# Introduction

The Torah, also known as the Five Books of Moses, has always held a special place in my heart. It’s a foundational text that offers wisdom, guidance, and spiritual depth. Every week, Jews around the world read a designated portion of the Torah, known as a parasha (parashot in plural), and reflect on its meaning. Alongside the Torah, generations of scholars have written extensive commentaries, offering their insights and interpretations of the sacred text. These commentaries add layers of richness to the Torah, but navigating through them can often be overwhelming due to their sheer volume and depth.

In this project, I wanted to create something that would help bridge that gap. Using the resources available on Sefaria, an incredible digital library of Jewish texts, I’ve gathered the weekly parashot and their available commentaries. These include the thoughts and reflections of scholars like Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Ramban, and others, whose words have shaped Jewish learning for centuries. For some lines, there were textbook’s worth of commentary.

But I also recognize that not everyone has the time to dive into the full breadth of these commentaries each week. That’s where I’ve employed OpenAI’s GPT model to help summarize the vast commentaries into concise, digestible insights. My goal is to sacrifice the depth and wisdom of these scholars to make it accessible, whether you’re a seasoned student of Torah or just starting out, to engage with the weekly readings. This way you can read from the generated booklet and have access to interesting notes.

In this book, you’ll find each weekly parasha, followed by a summarized commentary that draws from centuries of tradition. It’s my hope that this resource will make it easier for readers to engage with the text and the accompanying commentary, offering a clearer path into the richness of the Torah.

As part of my commitment to open learning, this project is open source and freely available for anyone to explore, contribute to, or use. You can find the source code on GitHub at https://github.com/DrAnomalocaris/SefriaToBooklets. I welcome contributions and feedback from the community to help this project grow and improve.

I’ve created this book for those who want to study the Torah more deeply, but also for those who might feel daunted by the vastness of the traditional commentaries. Whether you’re reading for personal reflection or using it as a guide for weekly study, I hope these summaries will inspire you to delve deeper into the text and connect with the timeless wisdom it offers.

# **40**: בלק|Balak

Numbers 22:2-25:9

## Numbers 22

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| וַיַּ֥רְא בָּלָ֖ק בֶּן־צִפּ֑וֹר אֵ֛ת כׇּל־אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂ֥ה יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל לָֽאֱמֹרִֽי׃ | 2 | Balak son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. |

Balak, king of Moav, feared the growing power of the Jewish people and sought to curse them, recognizing their divine protection and seeking assistance from Bileam. The text of the Parshah raises questions about the motivations and actions of the characters, as well as the repeated prophecies given by Bileam. Balak’s fear of Israel’s strength led him to seek Bileam’s curse, reflecting his desire to sever their special relationship with God and benefit his own people. Yitro heard about the miracles performed for the Israelites, prompting his journey into the desert, with different opinions on which specific events led him to do so.

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| וַיָּ֨גׇר מוֹאָ֜ב מִפְּנֵ֥י הָעָ֛ם מְאֹ֖ד כִּ֣י רַב־ה֑וּא וַיָּ֣קׇץ מוֹאָ֔ב מִפְּנֵ֖י בְּנֵ֥י יִשְׂרָאֵֽל׃ | 3 | Moab was alarmed because that people was so numerous. Moab dreaded the Israelites, |

The fear of the Moabites towards the Israelites stemmed from their large numbers and potential conquest, with Balak specifically fearing the conversion of his people to Judaism. The Moabites were alarmed by the Israelites appearing armed for war, as they had already lost land to other conquerors. The Israelites were forbidden to wage war against Moab, but could intimidate them, leading to the Moabites feeling threatened and disgusted by their presence. The fear of Moab is compared to that of the Egyptians towards the Israelites in Exodus, with references to fear and terror in various commentaries and Targums.

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| וַיֹּ֨אמֶר מוֹאָ֜ב אֶל־זִקְנֵ֣י מִדְיָ֗ן עַתָּ֞ה יְלַחֲכ֤וּ הַקָּהָל֙ אֶת־כׇּל־סְבִ֣יבֹתֵ֔ינוּ כִּלְחֹ֣ךְ הַשּׁ֔וֹר אֵ֖ת יֶ֣רֶק הַשָּׂדֶ֑ה וּבָלָ֧ק בֶּן־צִפּ֛וֹר מֶ֥לֶךְ לְמוֹאָ֖ב בָּעֵ֥ת הַהִֽוא׃ | 4 | and Moab said to the elders of Midian, “Now this horde will lick clean all that is about us as an ox licks up the grass of the field.” Balak son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, |

Chasidut highlights the importance of fulfilling commandments before enjoying the fruits of labor, while Balak feared the Israelites’ ability to elevate fallen sinners and attract converts. The Midrash and Targum discuss the alliance between Moav and Midian against Israel, with Balak appointed as king due to his valor and the perceived power of Moses. The Mishnah outlines the four primary categories of damage and the responsibility for prevention and restitution, with unique characteristics for each. Ramban’s commentary explains Balak’s fear of the Israelites’ power and the punishment of the Midianites for seducing them.

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| וַיִּשְׁלַ֨ח מַלְאָכִ֜ים אֶל־בִּלְעָ֣ם בֶּן־בְּעֹ֗ר פְּ֠ת֠וֹרָה אֲשֶׁ֧ר עַל־הַנָּהָ֛ר אֶ֥רֶץ בְּנֵי־עַמּ֖וֹ לִקְרֹא־ל֑וֹ לֵאמֹ֗ר הִ֠נֵּ֠ה עַ֣ם יָצָ֤א מִמִּצְרַ֙יִם֙ הִנֵּ֤ה כִסָּה֙ אֶת־עֵ֣ין הָאָ֔רֶץ וְה֥וּא יֹשֵׁ֖ב מִמֻּלִֽי׃ | 5 | sent messengers to Balaam son of Beor in Pethor, which is by the Euphrates, in the land of his kinsfolk, to invite him, saying, “There is a people that came out of Egypt; it hides the earth from view, and it is settled next to me. |

Chasidut discusses Bnei Yisrael’s revelation of Hashem’s hidden light, angering Balak and Bilam who opposed holiness and physicality. Commentary explains Balak’s financial arrangement with diviner Balaam to curse the Israelites. Jewish Thought envisions unity under one flag in messianic times, ending rivalry between parts of the nation. Midrash emphasizes the protection of Israel through observing the covenant. Musar connects sorcery to idolatry and re-incarnations of souls. Quoting Commentary highlights dangers of forming alliances with Canaanites and details of interactions in the story. Talmud discusses Balaam’s prophetic lineage and interpretations of different texts. Tanakh foretells locusts devouring crops in Exodus 10:5. Targum describes Balak sending Laban to summon Bil’am to curse the encamped Israelites.

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| וְעַתָּה֩ לְכָה־נָּ֨א אָֽרָה־לִּ֜י אֶת־הָעָ֣ם הַזֶּ֗ה כִּֽי־עָצ֥וּם הוּא֙ מִמֶּ֔נִּי אוּלַ֤י אוּכַל֙ נַכֶּה־בּ֔וֹ וַאֲגָרְשֶׁ֖נּוּ מִן־הָאָ֑רֶץ כִּ֣י יָדַ֗עְתִּי אֵ֤ת אֲשֶׁר־תְּבָרֵךְ֙ מְבֹרָ֔ךְ וַאֲשֶׁ֥ר תָּאֹ֖ר יוּאָֽר׃ | 6 | Come then, put a curse upon this people for me, since they are too numerous for me; perhaps I can thus defeat them and drive them out of the land. For I know that whomever you bless is blessed indeed, and whomever you curse is cursed.” |

Chasidut: Balak met Bileam at the border of Moab to remind him of the power of his curses, hoping he would curse Israel successfully, but God intervened turning their plans into blessings instead [1]. Commentary: Balak requests Balaam to curse the Israelites, acknowledging his reputation for effective blessings and curses, hoping to drive them away from the land [2]. Jewish Thought: The text emphasizes understanding deeper meanings behind prophetic words, using examples from various biblical verses and the importance of seeking new insights in every word [3]. Kabbalah: Rabbi Abba discusses the significance of prayer in the lives of Moses, David, and a poor man, emphasizing their connection to the divine [4]. Midrash: Bilam, a sorcerer hired by Balak to curse the Israelites, was unable to do so and instead blessed them, recognizing their unique relationship with God [5]. Musar: The text highlights the importance of being careful with words, as seen in Balak’s request for Bileam to curse Israel which resulted in cursing himself [6]. Quoting Commentary: Various interpretations of the creation of man and Balaam’s role in cursing and blessing people are discussed [7]. Tanakh: Deuteronomy 23:5 states that the Moabites did not provide for the Israelites during their journey from Egypt and hired Balaam to curse them [8]. Targum: Balak asks Balaam to curse the Israelites believing in the power of his blessings and curses to defeat them [9].

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| וַיֵּ֨לְכ֜וּ זִקְנֵ֤י מוֹאָב֙ וְזִקְנֵ֣י מִדְיָ֔ן וּקְסָמִ֖ים בְּיָדָ֑ם וַיָּבֹ֙אוּ֙ אֶל־בִּלְעָ֔ם וַיְדַבְּר֥וּ אֵלָ֖יו דִּבְרֵ֥י בָלָֽק׃ | 7 | The elders of Moab and the elders of Midian, versed in divination, set out. They came to Balaam and gave him Balak’s message. |

The elders of Moab and Midian brought divination tools and money to Balaam, showing the value placed on his sorcery skills. Enchantment and divination are discussed in relation to seeking the future and repentance in Jewish thought. Rabbi Yosi explains the strength of enchantment and divination, referencing Balaam and Laban’s failed attempts against the Israelites. The Midrash discusses Yitro’s repentance and the use of sorcery by Moav and Midian against Israel. Rabbeinu Bahya emphasizes the creation of man as a combination of celestial and earthly elements, contrasting with the punishment of the Midianites for getting involved in a conflict that did not concern them. The Talmud describes the alliance between Midian and Moab against the Jewish people as a strategic move despite their previous enmity. The elders of Moab and Midian brought magic charms and messages to Balaam in the Targum.

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| וַיֹּ֣אמֶר אֲלֵיהֶ֗ם לִ֤ינוּ פֹה֙ הַלַּ֔יְלָה וַהֲשִׁבֹתִ֤י אֶתְכֶם֙ דָּבָ֔ר כַּאֲשֶׁ֛ר יְדַבֵּ֥ר יְהֹוָ֖ה אֵלָ֑י וַיֵּשְׁב֥וּ שָׂרֵֽי־מוֹאָ֖ב עִם־בִּלְעָֽם׃ | 8 | He said to them, “Spend the night here, and I shall reply to you as יהוה may instruct me.” So the Moabite dignitaries stayed with Balaam. |

Balaam invited the Moabite emissaries to stay overnight, hoping for a revelation in a dream from the Lord, while the Midianite elders left because they believed Balaam consulting with God about cursing Israel would not yield a negative response. The elders of Moav and Midyan brought tools of sorcery to ensure Balaam’s compliance, but the elders of Midyan left when Balaam suggested they spend the night. Balaam’s arrogance is evident in his interactions, implying he viewed the messengers as ordinary and hoping for more important nobles to arrive.

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| וַיָּבֹ֥א אֱלֹהִ֖ים אֶל־בִּלְעָ֑ם וַיֹּ֕אמֶר מִ֛י הָאֲנָשִׁ֥ים הָאֵ֖לֶּה עִמָּֽךְ׃ | 9 | God came to Balaam and said, “What do these men want of you?” |

Balaam initially attributed Israel’s exodus from Egypt to their own efforts but later acknowledged it was God who brought them out, with only Jewish people able to invoke the merits of the patriarchs for mercy. Balaam’s responses to God’s questions revealed his true intentions and led to his downfall, as he was misled by God and could not curse Israel. God’s questions in the Torah are not because He doesn’t know the answer but to engage in dialogue, as seen with Balaam’s situation when he should have known God was aware of the messengers’ identity.

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| וַיֹּ֥אמֶר בִּלְעָ֖ם אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִ֑ים בָּלָ֧ק בֶּן־צִפֹּ֛ר מֶ֥לֶךְ מוֹאָ֖ב שָׁלַ֥ח אֵלָֽי׃ | 10 | Balaam said to God, “Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab, sent me this message: |

Bilaam feared cursing Israel after witnessing God’s miracles, Balak summoned him to ask for permission, the ninth verse holds deeper meaning related to Yoseph the Tsaddik and Yesod-foundation. Bilaam’s interaction with Balak highlights the importance of proper responses to divine inquiries, as seen in comparisons with Cain and King Chizkiyah. In Midrash, Bilaam is portrayed as a deceiver who falls into his own trap when trying to curse the Israelites, while Balak’s request is shown to be more severe than his original intention. Cain, Hezekiah, and Bilaam were all found unworthy in the eyes of God for their responses when questioned, lacking humility and reverence. Bil’am acknowledges Balak’s messengers in the Targum.

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| הִנֵּ֤ה הָעָם֙ הַיֹּצֵ֣א מִמִּצְרַ֔יִם וַיְכַ֖ס אֶת־עֵ֣ין הָאָ֑רֶץ עַתָּ֗ה לְכָ֤ה קָֽבָה־לִּי֙ אֹת֔וֹ אוּלַ֥י אוּכַ֛ל לְהִלָּ֥חֶם בּ֖וֹ וְגֵרַשְׁתִּֽיו׃ | 11 | Here is a people that came out from Egypt and hides the earth from view. Come now and curse them for me; perhaps I can engage them in battle and drive them off.” |

Balaam’s response to Balak’s request to curse the Israelites was more severe than what was originally asked for, reflecting his intense hatred towards them and his belief that he had the right to curse them for self-defense. God misled Balaam when he expressed his desire to curse the Israelites, ultimately leading to his demise when he sought payment for the Israelites who died. Onkelos and Targum Jonathan both describe Balak’s request for Balaam to curse the Israelites in Numbers 22:11.

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| וַיֹּ֤אמֶר אֱלֹהִים֙ אֶל־בִּלְעָ֔ם לֹ֥א תֵלֵ֖ךְ עִמָּהֶ֑ם לֹ֤א תָאֹר֙ אֶת־הָעָ֔ם כִּ֥י בָר֖וּךְ הֽוּא׃ | 12 | But God said to Balaam, “Do not go with them. You must not curse that people, for they are blessed.” |

God prevented Bileam from cursing the already blessed Israelites to avoid any association with potential harm, despite Bileam’s persistent desire to curse them. The Talmud discusses Bileam’s impudence and how he sought payment for blessing instead of cursing the Israelites, leading to a confrontation with Phineas. The Targum emphasizes that the Israelites have been blessed by God since the days of their fathers.

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| וַיָּ֤קׇם בִּלְעָם֙ בַּבֹּ֔קֶר וַיֹּ֙אמֶר֙ אֶל־שָׂרֵ֣י בָלָ֔ק לְכ֖וּ אֶֽל־אַרְצְכֶ֑ם כִּ֚י מֵאֵ֣ן יְהֹוָ֔ה לְתִתִּ֖י לַהֲלֹ֥ךְ עִמָּכֶֽם׃ | 13 | Balaam arose in the morning and said to Balak’s dignitaries, “Go back to your own country, for יהוה will not let me go with you.” |

Balaam, known for his arrogance and greed, refused to curse the Israelites as God was on their side, despite Balak’s suspicions of Balaam’s motives for not going with his princes. Balaam emphasized his obedience to God, stating he could not go against God’s command, even for great riches. Bilam’s evil traits of an evil eye, haughty spirit, and greedy soul were connected to his physical being, ultimately leading to his refusal to curse the Israelites. Bilam’s decision was based on God’s will, as he could not go against it, as stated in Targum Jonathan on Numbers 22:13.

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| וַיָּק֙וּמוּ֙ שָׂרֵ֣י מוֹאָ֔ב וַיָּבֹ֖אוּ אֶל־בָּלָ֑ק וַיֹּ֣אמְר֔וּ מֵאֵ֥ן בִּלְעָ֖ם הֲלֹ֥ךְ עִמָּֽנוּ׃ | 14 | The Moabite dignitaries left, and they came to Balak and said, “Balaam refused to come with us.” |

The princes of Moav suspected Bileam of being a liar and desiring more honor, as he did not immediately inform them of God’s answer, but understood something was holding him back from going with them. The Talmud explains that the yod in the word “ein” is superfluous and comes for the sake of an exposition. The Targum states that Moav’s dignitaries informed Balak that Bil’am refused to go with them.

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| וַיֹּ֥סֶף ע֖וֹד בָּלָ֑ק שְׁלֹ֣חַ שָׂרִ֔ים רַבִּ֥ים וְנִכְבָּדִ֖ים מֵאֵֽלֶּה׃ | 15 | Then Balak sent other dignitaries, more numerous and distinguished than the first. |

Chasidut explains that the heavenly bodies prostrate themselves towards the west at sunset, symbolizing their nullification to God’s light. Balak sent a more numerous and higher-ranking delegation to prevent Bileam from denying their reports. Bilam’s negative characteristics were an evil eye, a haughty spirit, and a greedy soul, leading him to attempt to curse the Israelites for personal gain. God prevented Bilam from cursing the people and ultimately blessed them instead.

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| וַיָּבֹ֖אוּ אֶל־בִּלְעָ֑ם וַיֹּ֣אמְרוּ ל֗וֹ כֹּ֤ה אָמַר֙ בָּלָ֣ק בֶּן־צִפּ֔וֹר אַל־נָ֥א תִמָּנַ֖ע מֵהֲלֹ֥ךְ אֵלָֽי׃ | 16 | They came to Balaam and said to him, “Thus says Balak son of Zippor: Please do not refuse to come to me. |

Bileam was initially suspected of declining an invitation for his own reasons, but clarified that he could not go against God’s will, despite assurances that his desire for honor had been satisfied. Balak’s messengers urged Bileam to come to him without hesitation, conveying Balak’s desire for Bileam’s assistance (Or HaChaim on Numbers 22:16:1; Steinsaltz on Numbers 22:16; Onkelos Numbers 22:16; Targum Jonathan on Numbers 22:16).

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| כִּֽי־כַבֵּ֤ד אֲכַבֶּדְךָ֙ מְאֹ֔ד וְכֹ֛ל אֲשֶׁר־תֹּאמַ֥ר אֵלַ֖י אֶֽעֱשֶׂ֑ה וּלְכָה־נָּא֙ קָֽבָה־לִּ֔י אֵ֖ת הָעָ֥ם הַזֶּֽה׃ | 17 | I will reward you richly and I will do anything you ask of me. Only come and damn this people for me.” |

Balak promises to honor Balaam greatly and do whatever he asks if he will come and curse the Israelites, but Balaam refuses to curse Israel despite the tempting offer, choosing to follow God’s command instead.

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| וַיַּ֣עַן בִּלְעָ֗ם וַיֹּ֙אמֶר֙ אֶל־עַבְדֵ֣י בָלָ֔ק אִם־יִתֶּן־לִ֥י בָלָ֛ק מְלֹ֥א בֵית֖וֹ כֶּ֣סֶף וְזָהָ֑ב לֹ֣א אוּכַ֗ל לַעֲבֹר֙ אֶת־פִּי֙ יְהֹוָ֣ה אֱלֹהָ֔י לַעֲשׂ֥וֹת קְטַנָּ֖ה א֥וֹ גְדוֹלָֽה׃ | 18 | Balaam replied to Balak’s officials, “Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, big or little, contrary to the command of my God יהוה. |

Chasidut explains that Kelipot are subordinate to divine light and only act when commissioned by God, as seen in Balaam’s statement in Numbers 22:18. Maimonides clarifies that not all who qualify as prophets will become one, as seen in Moses’ exclusive prayer for prophecy for the Jewish people. Bilam is described as a prophet but not a true one, more of an astrologer, with an evil eye and greedy soul. The Mishnah contrasts disciples of Abraham, known for their good eye, humble spirit, and moderate appetite, with disciples of Balaam, characterized by an evil eye, haughty spirit, and limitless appetite. Balaam’s refusal to disobey God’s command for material gain, as seen in Ramban on Numbers 22:13:2, contrasts with the disciples of Abraham known for their generosity, humility, and temperance. Disgracing friends for a mitzvah leads to honor, as seen with Moses and Pharaoh, in contrast to Bil’am and Balak’s relationship. Bil’am’s loyalty to God is highlighted in Targum Jonathan on Numbers 22:18, where he refuses to go against God’s word even for a house full of silver and gold.

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| וְעַתָּ֗ה שְׁב֨וּ נָ֥א בָזֶ֛ה גַּם־אַתֶּ֖ם הַלָּ֑יְלָה וְאֵ֣דְעָ֔ה מַה־יֹּסֵ֥ף יְהֹוָ֖ה דַּבֵּ֥ר עִמִּֽי׃ | 19 | So you, too, stay here overnight, and let me find out what else יהוה may say to me.” |

Balaam unintentionally spoke the truth to the dignitaries, fearing they would not wait for him due to their status. Despite God’s warning, Balaam sought to curse the Israelites. Balaam refused to curse the Israelites due to God’s directive, prophesied he could not nullify God’s blessings, and ultimately brought blessings to the Israelites. Balaam’s intended curses were transformed into blessings by God, with redemption dependent on Israel’s deservingness. God initially forbade Balaam from cursing Israel, allowing him to go with Balak’s messengers under the condition he only spoke God’s words, leading to God’s anger when Balaam failed to inform the messengers of these conditions. Onkelos and Targum Jonathan interpret Balaam asking Balak’s messengers to stay the night to hear more from God.

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| וַיָּבֹ֨א אֱלֹהִ֥ים ׀ אֶל־בִּלְעָם֮ לַ֒יְלָה֒ וַיֹּ֣אמֶר ל֗וֹ אִם־לִקְרֹ֤א לְךָ֙ בָּ֣אוּ הָאֲנָשִׁ֔ים ק֖וּם לֵ֣ךְ אִתָּ֑ם וְאַ֗ךְ אֶת־הַדָּבָ֛ר אֲשֶׁר־אֲדַבֵּ֥ר אֵלֶ֖יךָ אֹת֥וֹ תַעֲשֶֽׂה׃ | 20 | That night God came to Balaam and said to him, “If the agents have come to invite you, you may go with them. But whatever I command you, that you shall do.” |

Chasidut explains that Bileam’s evil intention to curse the Jewish people made him culpable in God’s eyes despite usually not punishing for such thoughts. Commentary highlights that God allowed Balaam to go with Balak’s messengers on the condition of only speaking God’s words, resulting in God’s anger when Balaam did not inform them of the conditions. Halakhah stresses the importance of being instructed by a teacher for good deeds and warns against ignorance to avoid punishment. Jewish Thought criticizes Ramban’s explanation for Pharaoh’s lack of repentance, preferring a view supported by Midrashim. Kabbalah emphasizes the difference between how God communicates with prophets of Israel and other nations. Midrash discusses the purity of messages received by prophets of Israel compared to those of other nations. Musar explores Yitro’s recognition of the Ineffable Name of God’s power over nature. Quoting Commentary explains that Balaam did not reach prophecy status and compares God’s anger towards him to Plato’s response to his students. Talmud discusses the effectiveness of impudence towards Heaven, citing Balaam’s persistence against God’s initial command. Tanakh describes Abraham’s respectful greeting of three figures in Genesis 18:2. Targum recounts God appearing to Bileam at night with instructions to only do what God tells him if the men call him.

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| וַיָּ֤קׇם בִּלְעָם֙ בַּבֹּ֔קֶר וַֽיַּחֲבֹ֖שׁ אֶת־אֲתֹנ֑וֹ וַיֵּ֖לֶךְ עִם־שָׂרֵ֥י מוֹאָֽב׃ | 21 | When he arose in the morning, Balaam saddled his ass and departed with the Moabite dignitaries. |

The text discusses how God reacts to the merits and sins of the Israelites, with merits immediately commanding His attention and sins being delayed due to the blowing of the shofar symbolizing Jewish history. Bilam’s actions of saddling his own donkey show disregard for his position and willingness to accompany the Moabite princes, similar to Abraham’s love for God leading him to do the same. Love and hatred can lead individuals to act contrary to their usual behavior, as seen with Abraham, Balaam, Joseph, and Pharaoh. Gad and Reuven’s insubordination is compared to Balaam’s persistence in wanting to curse Israel, with love and hatred disrupting the natural order. Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar teaches that love and hatred can lead people to act against their usual behavior, as seen in Abraham and Balaam both saddling their own donkeys in the morning.

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| וַיִּֽחַר־אַ֣ף אֱלֹהִים֮ כִּֽי־הוֹלֵ֣ךְ הוּא֒ וַיִּתְיַצֵּ֞ב מַלְאַ֧ךְ יְהֹוָ֛ה בַּדֶּ֖רֶךְ לְשָׂטָ֣ן ל֑וֹ וְהוּא֙ רֹכֵ֣ב עַל־אֲתֹנ֔וֹ וּשְׁנֵ֥י נְעָרָ֖יו עִמּֽוֹ׃ | 22 | But God was incensed at his going; so a messenger of יהוה took a position in his way as an adversary. He was riding on his she-ass, with his two servants alongside, |

God’s anger towards Bileam was justified because his intention to curse the Jewish people went against God’s will, leading to his punishment. The story of Abraham and Isaac highlights the importance of obedience to God’s commands. The angel that appeared to Bilaam symbolized the High Priest during the Avodah Service on Yom Kippur. The Mishna emphasizes the importance of offering optimal produce in meal offerings.

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| וַתֵּ֣רֶא הָאָתוֹן֩ אֶת־מַלְאַ֨ךְ יְהֹוָ֜ה נִצָּ֣ב בַּדֶּ֗רֶךְ וְחַרְבּ֤וֹ שְׁלוּפָה֙ בְּיָד֔וֹ וַתֵּ֤ט הָֽאָתוֹן֙ מִן־הַדֶּ֔רֶךְ וַתֵּ֖לֶךְ בַּשָּׂדֶ֑ה וַיַּ֤ךְ בִּלְעָם֙ אֶת־הָ֣אָת֔וֹן לְהַטֹּתָ֖הּ הַדָּֽרֶךְ׃ | 23 | when the ass caught sight of the messenger of יהוה standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand. The ass swerved from the road and went into the fields; and Balaam beat the ass to turn her back onto the road. |

The text discusses the creation of the kelim and orot of the sefirot in the worlds of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, the perception of angels by animals and humans, the relationship between prophecy and enchantment using Bileam as an example, the story of Bilam and the angel of the Lord in Numbers 22, and the concern of advisors about how to punish sinners without facing punishment themselves. The donkey’s reaction to the angel is described as a feeling of fear, not physical sight, and Saul’s downfall is attributed to his failure to seek repentance and guidance from God. The Midrash contrasts Bilam’s actions with those of Jethro and Job and analyzes the story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38.

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| וַֽיַּעֲמֹד֙ מַלְאַ֣ךְ יְהֹוָ֔ה בְּמִשְׁע֖וֹל הַכְּרָמִ֑ים גָּדֵ֥ר מִזֶּ֖ה וְגָדֵ֥ר מִזֶּֽה׃ | 24 | The messenger of יהוה then stationed himself in a lane between the vineyards, with a fence on either side. |

Rashi explains “גדר” as a stone wall, Ibn Ezra interprets “mishol” as “in a path,” and Chizkuni suggests the fence could be stone piles from Yaakov and Lavan. In the Midrash, God’s angel confronts Bilam indirectly with signs of the patriarchs to prevent him from cursing their descendants, emphasizing the sparing of Bilam’s honor and the significance of the donkey’s death. Bileam is warned by the angel to follow the example of the patriarchs and not rely on sorcery, being identified as a reincarnation of Laban and connected to Balak, ancestor of Ruth and King David. In the quoted commentary, Rashi explains “for the soles of the feet,” Rashbam discusses the importance of specific letters in Hebrew words, Sforno compares God’s visitation to Abimelech with instances involving Lavan and Bileam, and Rashi explains “with his gait” in Isaiah 40:12:2. The Targum describes the angel of the Lord standing in a narrow path between vineyards to prevent evil.

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| וַתֵּ֨רֶא הָאָת֜וֹן אֶת־מַלְאַ֣ךְ יְהֹוָ֗ה וַתִּלָּחֵץ֙ אֶל־הַקִּ֔יר וַתִּלְחַ֛ץ אֶת־רֶ֥גֶל בִּלְעָ֖ם אֶל־הַקִּ֑יר וַיֹּ֖סֶף לְהַכֹּתָֽהּ׃ | 25 | The ass, seeing the messenger of יהוה, pressed herself against the wall and squeezed Balaam’s foot against the wall; so he beat her again. |

Rashi and Rashbam explain that the donkey pressed herself against the wall in Numbers 22:25, leading to Balaam’s foot being pressed. Ibn Ezra clarifies the meaning of “וַתִּלָּחֵץ” as the donkey thrusting herself against a fence. In the Midrash, the angel confronts Balaam to prevent him from cursing Israel and shows him signs related to the patriarchs. Rashbam connects Yaakov’s injury to Balaam’s punishment for contravening God’s will. The Targum describes how the donkey reacted to seeing the angel of Adonoy.

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| וַיּ֥וֹסֶף מַלְאַךְ־יְהֹוָ֖ה עֲב֑וֹר וַֽיַּעֲמֹד֙ בְּמָק֣וֹם צָ֔ר אֲשֶׁ֛ר אֵֽין־דֶּ֥רֶךְ לִנְט֖וֹת יָמִ֥ין וּשְׂמֹֽאול׃ | 26 | Once more the messenger of יהוה moved forward and stationed himself on a spot so narrow that there was no room to swerve right or left. |

The angel of the Lord protected the Israelites from harm by standing in front of Balaam, symbolizing the patriarchs’ merits and preventing curses. Halakhah states that one must save a consecrated maiden from a pursuer, even if it means taking the pursuer’s life. In Midrash, God’s angel stops Bilam from cursing the Israelites, controlling speech through the donkey. Rabbeinu Bahya interprets “שפיפון” as being lame on both feet. The Talmud discusses the status of buying in Ammon and Moab for Sabbatical and tithes, referring to Reuben and Gad in Transjordan. Targum describes the angel standing in a narrow place where there was no room to turn.

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| וַתֵּ֤רֶא הָֽאָתוֹן֙ אֶת־מַלְאַ֣ךְ יְהֹוָ֔ה וַתִּרְבַּ֖ץ תַּ֣חַת בִּלְעָ֑ם וַיִּֽחַר־אַ֣ף בִּלְעָ֔ם וַיַּ֥ךְ אֶת־הָאָת֖וֹן בַּמַּקֵּֽל׃ | 27 | When the ass now saw the messenger of יהוה, she lay down under Balaam; and Balaam was furious and beat the ass with his stick. |

Bilam’s donkey saw the angel of the Lord and refused to continue serving him, prompting Bilam to strike the donkey with his staff in frustration. The laws of a rodef apply to both pursuers of murder and rape, as equated in Deuteronomy 22:26. The angel of the Lord concealed himself to prevent Bilam from cursing the descendants of the patriarchs, and the donkey spoke to him before dying to prevent it from becoming an object of worship. Rashbam and Chizkuni discuss the use of constructs and walking staffs in various biblical passages, including Numbers 22:27 where Bilam used a staff to urge on the donkey. Onkelos and Targum Jonathan describe the scene where the donkey crouched beneath Bilam and was beaten by him in response to seeing the angel of the Lord.

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| וַיִּפְתַּ֥ח יְהֹוָ֖ה אֶת־פִּ֣י הָאָת֑וֹן וַתֹּ֤אמֶר לְבִלְעָם֙ מֶה־עָשִׂ֣יתִֽי לְךָ֔ כִּ֣י הִכִּיתַ֔נִי זֶ֖ה שָׁלֹ֥שׁ רְגָלִֽים׃ | 28 | Then יהוה opened the ass’s mouth, and she said to Balaam, “What have I done to you that you have beaten me these three times?” |

Balaam’s donkey spoke to prevent him from cursing the Jewish people, showing that even animals understood the inadmissibility of such an act and that God can perform miracles to save sinners. The donkey’s speaking was a compliment to the Jewish people, and it was a great miracle. The interaction between Balaam and his donkey demonstrates supernatural elements and the theme of leadership in the Book of Numbers. Ten things were created on the eve of the Sabbath, including the mouth of the earth, the Shamir, and the ram of Abraham. The Targum Jonathan states that the Word of the Lord opened the donkey’s mouth to speak to Balaam.

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| וַיֹּ֤אמֶר בִּלְעָם֙ לָֽאָת֔וֹן כִּ֥י הִתְעַלַּ֖לְתְּ בִּ֑י ל֤וּ יֶשׁ־חֶ֙רֶב֙ בְּיָדִ֔י כִּ֥י עַתָּ֖ה הֲרַגְתִּֽיךְ׃ | 29 | Balaam said to the ass, “You have made a mockery of me! If I had a sword with me, I’d kill you.” |

Bilam showed disdain for the speaking donkey and wished he could kill it, while Moses communicated effortlessly with God and had a close relationship with Him. In Bamidbar Rabbah 20:14, God’s angel prevented Bilam from cursing the Israelites by showing him signs of the patriarchs. Rashi explains that “I HAVE MOCKED” in Exodus 10:2 means manipulating events to inflict harm, and Targum Jonathan on Numbers 22:29 shows Bilam’s anger towards the donkey for ridiculing him.

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| וַתֹּ֨אמֶר הָאָת֜וֹן אֶל־בִּלְעָ֗ם הֲלוֹא֩ אָנֹכִ֨י אֲתֹֽנְךָ֜ אֲשֶׁר־רָכַ֣בְתָּ עָלַ֗י מֵעֽוֹדְךָ֙ עַד־הַיּ֣וֹם הַזֶּ֔ה הַֽהַסְכֵּ֣ן הִסְכַּ֔נְתִּי לַעֲשׂ֥וֹת לְךָ֖ כֹּ֑ה וַיֹּ֖אמֶר לֹֽא׃ | 30 | The ass said to Balaam, “Look, I am the ass that you have been riding all along until this day! Have I been in the habit of doing thus to you?” And he answered, “No.” |

Bilaam is viewed as a parallel to Moshe in evil forces, with his immersion in evil desires evident in his questioning habits. The donkey’s rebuke of Bilaam in Numbers 22:30 teaches him of his failed plan, emphasizing God’s control over speech. The difficulty of confronting admonishment, as seen in Joseph and Bilaam, is highlighted in Bereshit Rabbah, while the Talmud recounts Balaam’s debate with his donkey, showcasing the power of the animal’s words. The Targum translations emphasize the donkey’s rebuke of Bilaam, questioning his intentions and highlighting their shared history.

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| וַיְגַ֣ל יְהֹוָה֮ אֶת־עֵינֵ֣י בִלְעָם֒ וַיַּ֞רְא אֶת־מַלְאַ֤ךְ יְהֹוָה֙ נִצָּ֣ב בַּדֶּ֔רֶךְ וְחַרְבּ֥וֹ שְׁלֻפָ֖ה בְּיָד֑וֹ וַיִּקֹּ֥ד וַיִּשְׁתַּ֖חוּ לְאַפָּֽיו׃ | 31 | Then יהוה uncovered Balaam’s eyes, and he saw the messenger of יהוה standing in the way, his drawn sword in his hand; thereupon he bowed right down to the ground. |

Balaam was a sorcerer who briefly experienced prophetic visions but ultimately returned to his original status, leading to his death by the sword. The commentary questions Joshua’s act of bowing down to an angel, contrasting it with other biblical figures who did not do so. The Midrash emphasizes the themes of repentance, divine intervention, and consequences of one’s actions. Ramban explains that angels can be perceived through a prophet’s perception, as seen in Balaam’s encounter with the angel. Balaam’s downfall was attributed to following omens and false soothsayings, despite seeing the angel of God. The Targum highlights how the Lord enabled Balaam to see the angel with a drawn sword, leading him to bow and prostrate himself.

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| וַיֹּ֤אמֶר אֵלָיו֙ מַלְאַ֣ךְ יְהֹוָ֔ה עַל־מָ֗ה הִכִּ֙יתָ֙ אֶת־אֲתֹ֣נְךָ֔ זֶ֖ה שָׁל֣וֹשׁ רְגָלִ֑ים הִנֵּ֤ה אָנֹכִי֙ יָצָ֣אתִי לְשָׂטָ֔ן כִּֽי־יָרַ֥ט הַדֶּ֖רֶךְ לְנֶגְדִּֽי׃ | 32 | The messenger of יהוה said to him, “Why have you beaten your ass these three times? It is I who came out as an adversary, for the errand is obnoxious to me. |

The angel of the Lord questioned Balaam for striking his she-ass three times as a warning from God to stop his mission, due to his evil intentions. Balaam’s obstinacy led to the loss of his prophetic abilities and the presence of the Holy Spirit. The duty to prevent animal suffering is debated as being either biblical or rabbinic, with most authorities agreeing on the biblical nature of the obligation. The Law of Moses teaches that all events are distributed justly by God, with even the smallest pleasure being a reward for good actions. The Torah prohibits causing pain to animals, aiming to cultivate compassion and prevent cruelty. The school of Rabbi Natan and Rabbi Yishmael provide interpretations of abbreviations in the Torah, highlighting hidden meanings within the text. The Torah prohibits causing pain to animals, as seen in the story of Bilam and his donkey, to teach us to show pity and mercy to all living creatures.

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| וַתִּרְאַ֙נִי֙ הָֽאָת֔וֹן וַתֵּ֣ט לְפָנַ֔י זֶ֖ה שָׁלֹ֣שׁ רְגָלִ֑ים אוּלַי֙ נָטְתָ֣ה מִפָּנַ֔י כִּ֥י עַתָּ֛ה גַּם־אֹתְכָ֥ה הָרַ֖גְתִּי וְאוֹתָ֥הּ הֶחֱיֵֽיתִי׃ | 33 | And when the ass saw me, she shied away because of me those three times. If she had not shied away from me, you are the one I should have killed, while sparing her.” |

In Numbers 22:33, the word “l’phanai” is interpreted as “from before me” and “ulai” as “unless,” while the phrase “gam othchah haragti” implies the ass died after speaking, sparing Balaam’s life but killing the ass. The Lord uncovered Bilam’s eyes to see the angel, who spared Bilam and would have killed him instead of the donkey, emphasizing the power of repentance and consequences of going against God’s will. In Genesis, Jacob’s question about providing for his household is discussed, with the word “gam” often introducing something opposite or different, as seen in various scenarios throughout the Torah. Onkelos and Targum Jonathan interpret the donkey’s actions as saving Balaam’s life in Numbers 22:33.

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| וַיֹּ֨אמֶר בִּלְעָ֜ם אֶל־מַלְאַ֤ךְ יְהֹוָה֙ חָטָ֔אתִי כִּ֚י לֹ֣א יָדַ֔עְתִּי כִּ֥י אַתָּ֛ה נִצָּ֥ב לִקְרָאתִ֖י בַּדָּ֑רֶךְ וְעַתָּ֛ה אִם־רַ֥ע בְּעֵינֶ֖יךָ אָשׁ֥וּבָה לִּֽי׃ | 34 | Balaam said to the messenger of יהוה, “I erred because I did not know that you were standing in my way. If you still disapprove, I will turn back.” |

The text discusses the severity of the donkey representing the Nukvah of Zeir Anpin of the Kelipah, Balaam’s confession of ignorance and willingness to change course, the importance of learning and understanding the will of God, the concept of evil in man, the significance of confession for atonement, the power of repentance, and the consequences of wickedness.

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| וַיֹּ֩אמֶר֩ מַלְאַ֨ךְ יְהֹוָ֜ה אֶל־בִּלְעָ֗ם לֵ֚ךְ עִם־הָ֣אֲנָשִׁ֔ים וְאֶ֗פֶס אֶת־הַדָּבָ֛ר אֲשֶׁר־אֲדַבֵּ֥ר אֵלֶ֖יךָ אֹת֣וֹ תְדַבֵּ֑ר וַיֵּ֥לֶךְ בִּלְעָ֖ם עִם־שָׂרֵ֥י בָלָֽק׃ | 35 | But the messenger of יהוה said to Balaam, “Go with the men. But you must say nothing except what I tell you.” So Balaam went on with Balak’s dignitaries. |

The angel warns Balaam to only speak God’s words, highlighting Balaam’s sins in seeking to curse the Israelites and manipulating God. Balaam is confronted for mistreating his donkey, warned of his wrongdoing, and ultimately faces consequences for his actions. The importance of following God’s instructions is emphasized in various texts, with a wicked messenger facing harm and a faithful messenger bringing healing. The angel instructs Balaam to speak only what is commanded, leading to his ultimate fate.

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| וַיִּשְׁמַ֥ע בָּלָ֖ק כִּ֣י בָ֣א בִלְעָ֑ם וַיֵּצֵ֨א לִקְרָאת֜וֹ אֶל־עִ֣יר מוֹאָ֗ב אֲשֶׁר֙ עַל־גְּב֣וּל אַרְנֹ֔ן אֲשֶׁ֖ר בִּקְצֵ֥ה הַגְּבֽוּל׃ | 36 | When Balak heard that Balaam was coming, he went out to meet him at Ir-moab, which is on the Arnon border, at its farthest point. |

Balak met Bileam at the border of Moab to remind him of past success in cursing Moab, hoping to encourage him to curse Israel. God intervened and turned their plans into blessings instead. Balak heard Balaam was coming and sent messengers to announce it. Balaam went to the city of Moab, where Balak met him, possibly for political reasons related to the border. Balak sent emissaries to inform Balaam of his arrival, and they met at the border of Moav, concerned about the breach of borders by the Israelites. Balak questioned Balaam about his delayed arrival, prophesying his eventual disgrace, to which Balaam responded that he did not have permission to speak freely. Ramban explains that in Exodus 12:12, the Midrash interprets the verse as emphasizing that God Himself, not a messenger, will execute the judgments in Egypt, showing that God alone is responsible for the plagues. The term “mattatron” is discussed, referring to a guide or messenger, and the Rabbis emphasize that God is one and there is no other god beside Him. Balak went out to meet Balaam at the city of Moav on the boundary of Arnon, at the edge of the boundary.

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| וַיֹּ֨אמֶר בָּלָ֜ק אֶל־בִּלְעָ֗ם הֲלֹא֩ שָׁלֹ֨חַ שָׁלַ֤חְתִּי אֵלֶ֙יךָ֙ לִקְרֹא־לָ֔ךְ לָ֥מָּה לֹא־הָלַ֖כְתָּ אֵלָ֑י הַֽאֻמְנָ֔ם לֹ֥א אוּכַ֖ל כַּבְּדֶֽךָ׃ | 37 | Balak said to Balaam, “When I first sent to invite you, why didn’t you come to me? Am I really unable to reward you?” |

Chasidut explains Balak’s fear of the Israelites potentially conquering the Moabites, leading to the nullification of the prohibition against attacking them. Balaam’s prophecy of leaving Balak in disgrace is indicated by the phrase “האמנם לא אוכל כבדך” in Numbers 22:37, and his refusal to go with Balak’s princes was due to his loyalty to God. Balak questioned why Balaam did not come earlier and if he believed he could not honor him, as seen in Targum Jonathan on Numbers 22:37.

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| וַיֹּ֨אמֶר בִּלְעָ֜ם אֶל־בָּלָ֗ק הִֽנֵּה־בָ֙אתִי֙ אֵלֶ֔יךָ עַתָּ֕ה הֲיָכֹ֥ל אוּכַ֖ל דַּבֵּ֣ר מְא֑וּמָה הַדָּבָ֗ר אֲשֶׁ֨ר יָשִׂ֧ים אֱלֹהִ֛ים בְּפִ֖י אֹת֥וֹ אֲדַבֵּֽר׃ | 38 | But Balaam said to Balak, “And now that I have come to you, have I the power to speak freely? I can utter only the word that God puts into my mouth.” |

Bilam acknowledges his limitations and inability to speak freely, as he can only convey the words that God puts in his mouth, demonstrating his wickedness and desire to curse the Jewish people. Moses’ close relationship with God is contrasted with Bilam’s need for divine approval for every utterance, highlighting the unique nature of Moses’ prophetic abilities. Balak’s concern about breaching borders since Noah’s time is addressed as Bilam prophesies his own disgrace, indicating his lack of permission to speak freely. Ramban explains that God allowed Bilam to go with Balak’s men but instructed him to only speak the words that God would tell him to say, preventing him from cursing the Israelites as he intended. Targum Jonathan and Onkelos also emphasize Bilam’s dependence on God’s words, reinforcing his inability to speak of his own will.

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| וַיֵּ֥לֶךְ בִּלְעָ֖ם עִם־בָּלָ֑ק וַיָּבֹ֖אוּ קִרְיַ֥ת חֻצֽוֹת׃ | 39 | Balaam went with Balak and they came to Kiriath-huzoth. |

The city of Kiryat Hutzot is described as bustling with people, prompting pity to prevent their extermination. Balak did not show Bileam honor, making him walk behind. Balak established markets to show the massive population he wanted cursed, but only sent one bull and one sheep, leading Bileam to plot against him. Bil’am accompanied Balak to Kiryas Chutzos, also known as the city of his territory, arriving at the walled city of Sihon, called Berosha.

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| וַיִּזְבַּ֥ח בָּלָ֖ק בָּקָ֣ר וָצֹ֑אן וַיְשַׁלַּ֣ח לְבִלְעָ֔ם וְלַשָּׂרִ֖ים אֲשֶׁ֥ר אִתּֽוֹ׃ | 40 | Balak sacrificed oxen and sheep, and had them served to Balaam and the dignitaries with him. |

Balak sent a small amount of cattle and sheep to Bileam, not fulfilling his promise to honor him greatly, revealing his lack of respect and stinginess. Bileam threatened to curse Balak’s possessions and demanded a larger sacrifice. Balak’s deceitful nature and failure to fulfill promises are evident in his actions. Balak established markets of commerce to show Bileam the massive population he wanted him to curse, slaughtered cattle and sheep to honor him, but only sent one of each, causing Bileam to plot a curse on his property. Bileam demanded seven altars and sacrifices to prepare for the curse. Balak also slaughtered cattle and sheep and sent them to Bileam and his companions.

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| וַיְהִ֣י בַבֹּ֔קֶר וַיִּקַּ֤ח בָּלָק֙ אֶת־בִּלְעָ֔ם וַֽיַּעֲלֵ֖הוּ בָּמ֣וֹת בָּ֑עַל וַיַּ֥רְא מִשָּׁ֖ם קְצֵ֥ה הָעָֽם׃ | 41 | In the morning Balak took Balaam up to Bamoth-baal. From there he could see a portion of the people. |

Balak brought Balaam to a high place to curse the Israelites, showing him the vast population he wanted cursed but only sending one bull and one sheep. Despite being taken to the heights of Baal Peor, Balaam was unable to curse Israel and instead blessed them, with God placing speech in his mouth. The location was significant as it was linked to the cult of Baal Peor, and Balaam’s ability to see the people was attributed to Balak’s magic involving a bird. (Midrash, Commentary, Targum)

## Numbers 23

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| וַיֹּ֤אמֶר בִּלְעָם֙ אֶל־בָּלָ֔ק בְּנֵה־לִ֥י בָזֶ֖ה שִׁבְעָ֣ה מִזְבְּחֹ֑ת וְהָכֵ֥ן לִי֙ בָּזֶ֔ה שִׁבְעָ֥ה פָרִ֖ים וְשִׁבְעָ֥ה אֵילִֽים׃ | 1 | Balaam said to Balak, “Build me seven altars here and have seven bulls and seven rams ready here for me.” |

Moses’ prophecy focused on the holiness of matter, while Bileam’s prophecy dealt with the peels surrounding the essence of matter. Bileam’s request for seven altars and offerings aimed to avert G-d’s decree of destruction on the Canaanite nations. Midrashic literature portrays the tribe of Dan in a negative light due to their idolatrous tendencies, which are evident even in the desert wanderings of Israel. In Targum, Bil’am asked Balak to build seven altars and prepare seven bulls and seven rams for sacrifice, as he observed strange worship among them and rejoiced in his heart.

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| וַיַּ֣עַשׂ בָּלָ֔ק כַּאֲשֶׁ֖ר דִּבֶּ֣ר בִּלְעָ֑ם וַיַּ֨עַל בָּלָ֧ק וּבִלְעָ֛ם פָּ֥ר וָאַ֖יִל בַּמִּזְבֵּֽחַ׃ | 2 | Balak did as Balaam directed; and Balak and Balaam offered up a bull and a ram on each altar. |

Bileam offered sacrifices on seven altars, emulating the patriarchs, to see if God would object, believing that G’d only prohibited sinful actions. Balak and Bileam offered a bull and a ram on each altar together, strengthening their bond. Balak took Bilam to the heights of Baal Peor to see where Israel would fall, Bilam asked for seven altars corresponding to seven righteous men, Bilam intended to curse but was troubled, God questioned Bilam’s intentions, and the Lord placed words in Bilam’s mouth to bless Israel. Balak followed Bil’am’s instructions and together they sacrificed an ox and a ram on each altar.

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| וַיֹּ֨אמֶר בִּלְעָ֜ם לְבָלָ֗ק הִתְיַצֵּב֮ עַל־עֹלָתֶ֒ךָ֒ וְאֵֽלְכָ֗ה אוּלַ֞י יִקָּרֵ֤ה יְהֹוָה֙ לִקְרָאתִ֔י וּדְבַ֥ר מַה־יַּרְאֵ֖נִי וְהִגַּ֣דְתִּי לָ֑ךְ וַיֵּ֖לֶךְ שֶֽׁפִי׃ | 3 | Then Balaam said to Balak, “Stay here beside your offerings while I am gone. Perhaps יהוה will grant me a manifestation, and whatever is revealed to me I will tell you.” And he went off alone. |

Balaam sought a vision from God while consumed with hatred for the Jewish people, possibly going to a high place alone or limping. Samson is compared to God in protecting Israel, while Balak is seen as a greater sorcerer than Balaam. The concept of exile being for the good of the Jewish people is discussed, with references to the ongoing redemption process and the role of the tribe of Dan in a future battle. In the Talmud, Rabbi Yoḥanan states that Balaam was lame in one leg and blind in one eye, while Samson was lame in both legs. Bil’am sought a word from the Lord alone with a humble heart.

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| וַיִּקָּ֥ר אֱלֹהִ֖ים אֶל־בִּלְעָ֑ם וַיֹּ֣אמֶר אֵלָ֗יו אֶת־שִׁבְעַ֤ת הַֽמִּזְבְּחֹת֙ עָרַ֔כְתִּי וָאַ֛עַל פָּ֥ר וָאַ֖יִל בַּמִּזְבֵּֽחַ׃ | 4 | God became manifest to Balaam, who stated, “I have set up the seven altars and offered up a bull and a ram on each altar.” |

The text discusses how God communicated with Balaam in a unique way, with references to the significance of Balaam’s offerings on seven altars symbolizing completeness and cycles. Balaam’s experiences were compared to other biblical figures like Avraham and Job, highlighting the distinct nature of his interactions with God. Additionally, the Midrash emphasizes the differences in how God communicates with prophets of Israel and prophets of other nations, highlighting the special status of the Israelites as God’s chosen people. Ramban explains that Balaam’s burnt-offerings were meant to differentiate from idolatrous practices, and the number seven symbolized completion and perfection. In Targum, God appeared to Balaam after he set up seven altars and offered sacrifices.

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| וַיָּ֧שֶׂם יְהֹוָ֛ה דָּבָ֖ר בְּפִ֣י בִלְעָ֑ם וַיֹּ֛אמֶר שׁ֥וּב אֶל־בָּלָ֖ק וְכֹ֥ה תְדַבֵּֽר׃ | 5 | And יהוה put a word in Balaam’s mouth and said, “Return to Balak and speak thus.” |

Various interpretations exist regarding how God put words in Balaam’s mouth, with some suggesting he spoke accurately without understanding, while others argue he was carefully trained by God. Balaam was aware of the words he spoke, likened to bodies of water separated by a barrier, and was instructed to speak a general message to Balak. The theological debate includes false contentions by Christian theologians and the symbolic fear of Israel ruling over Zion. Balaam’s intended curses turned into blessings, recognizing Israel’s righteousness and ancestors. Moses reached Balaam’s prophetic levels through personal efforts, with Balaam’s blessings seen as prophetic insights granted by God. The Torah disqualifies Balaam as a true leader, emphasizing his dependence on divine intervention for prophecy. Rabbi Elazar believes an angel spoke from Balaam’s mouth, while Rabbi Yonatan thinks a hook prevented him from saying more. Targum mentions that God put a message in Balaam’s mouth to deliver to Balak.

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| וַיָּ֣שׇׁב אֵלָ֔יו וְהִנֵּ֥ה נִצָּ֖ב עַל־עֹלָת֑וֹ ה֖וּא וְכׇל־שָׂרֵ֥י מוֹאָֽב׃ | 6 | So he returned to him and found him standing beside his offerings, and all the Moabite dignitaries with him. |

Balak, a sorcerer, brought Balaam to curse Israel, but God intervened and Balaam blessed them instead. Despite Balak’s efforts to have Israel cursed, Balaam saw that they were beloved by God and ultimately blessed them. Both Balak and Balaam were sons of undistinguished fathers, and God showed mercy to Israel when they repented. Balaam’s inability to curse Israel is likened to Lavan’s use of oracles to identify the source of Yaakov’s wealth, highlighting the region’s association with magic practices.

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| וַיִּשָּׂ֥א מְשָׁל֖וֹ וַיֹּאמַ֑ר מִן־אֲ֠רָ֠ם יַנְחֵ֨נִי בָלָ֤ק מֶֽלֶךְ־מוֹאָב֙ מֵֽהַרְרֵי־קֶ֔דֶם לְכָה֙ אָֽרָה־לִּ֣י יַעֲקֹ֔ב וּלְכָ֖ה זֹעֲמָ֥ה יִשְׂרָאֵֽל׃ | 7 | He took up his theme, and said: From Aram has Balak brought me, Moab’s king from the hills of the East: Come, curse me Jacob, Come, tell Israel’s doom! |

Bileam sought to curse the Israelites by finding a virtue possessed by the Moabites using the word “ארה” in Chasidut, while the Targum can possess both good and evil qualities. Moses is criticized for resorting to prayer instead of action in Jewish Thought, contrasting with Bileam who required preparation to communicate with God. In Kabbalah, Bilaam learned enchantments and magic from fallen angels, leading to his abandonment by HaShem. The Midrash discusses Balaam’s attempt to curse the Israelites and the consequences of speaking evil, while Musar emphasizes the prohibition of sorcery. The Second Temple commentary highlights Balak’s foolishness in seeking to curse Israel, and the Talmud discusses the identity of Elihu Ben Barakhel.

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| מָ֣ה אֶקֹּ֔ב לֹ֥א קַבֹּ֖ה אֵ֑ל וּמָ֣ה אֶזְעֹ֔ם לֹ֥א זָעַ֖ם יְהֹוָֽה׃ | 8 | How can I damn whom God has not damned, How doom when יהוה has not doomed? |

Bileam’s attempts to curse the Israelites were thwarted by God due to their innocence and unique relationship with Him, leading to his curses being turned into blessings. The Midrash emphasizes the inseparability of the Israelites from God and the importance of following His commands. Bileam’s failed curses ultimately led to harm for the Israelites, highlighting God’s restraint from anger and the impossibility of diminishing the blessed people of Israel.

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| כִּֽי־מֵרֹ֤אשׁ צֻרִים֙ אֶרְאֶ֔נּוּ וּמִגְּבָע֖וֹת אֲשׁוּרֶ֑נּוּ הֶן־עָם֙ לְבָדָ֣ד יִשְׁכֹּ֔ן וּבַגּוֹיִ֖ם לֹ֥א יִתְחַשָּֽׁב׃ | 9 | As I see them from the mountain tops, Gaze on them from the heights, There is a people that dwells apart, Not reckoned among the nations, |

Chasidut discusses the four primary categories of damage symbolizing negative behaviors, Shmini Atzeret as a day of joy above Sukkot, the intellect overpowering emotions, and the importance of self-sacrifice for Torah. Balaam’s understanding highlights the significance of Israel in the creation of the universe. The Jewish people are seen as distinct and separate, not reckoned among the nations, marked by their non-universality and tied to their divine covenant for survival and history. Kabbalah emphasizes the importance of righteousness and seeking God’s word, while Midrash underscores the uniqueness and divine protection of the Jewish people. Musar discusses the special rewards and eventual lofty status of Israel through suffering as an expression of God’s love. Various commentators elaborate on the significance of Israel dwelling alone and being judged by the attribute of Justice. The Talmud and Tanakh affirm that the Jewish people are meant to dwell alone and are unique among the nations, as seen in Balaam’s vision and the blessing given to Israel.

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| מִ֤י מָנָה֙ עֲפַ֣ר יַעֲקֹ֔ב וּמִסְפָּ֖ר אֶת־רֹ֣בַע יִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל תָּמֹ֤ת נַפְשִׁי֙ מ֣וֹת יְשָׁרִ֔ים וּתְהִ֥י אַחֲרִיתִ֖י כָּמֹֽהוּ׃ | 10 | Who can count the dust of Jacob, Number the dust-cloud of Israel? May I die the death of the upright, May my fate be like theirs! |

Balaam prophesied that the Israelites would increase like the dust of the earth and not mix with other nations, expressing a desire to die the death of the righteous. The Talmud emphasizes impartial judgment based on actions, belief in the immortality of the soul, and the importance of humility towards God. Selichot prayers reference Balaam’s blessings, and Midrash compares his actions to cutting down a tree. Musar discusses Bileam’s hope for an afterlife like that of Israel and his ultimate fate. Tanakh mentions God’s promises to Abraham and Jacob, while Targum acknowledges the righteousness of the house of Israel.

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| וַיֹּ֤אמֶר בָּלָק֙ אֶל־בִּלְעָ֔ם מֶ֥ה עָשִׂ֖יתָ לִ֑י לָקֹ֤ב אֹיְבַי֙ לְקַחְתִּ֔יךָ וְהִנֵּ֖ה בֵּרַ֥כְתָּ בָרֵֽךְ׃ | 11 | Then Balak said to Balaam, “What have you done to me? Here I brought you to damn my enemies, and instead you have blessed them!” |

Balak hired Bileam to curse the Israelites, but Bileam blessed them instead, surprising Balak who expected at least neutrality. Balak realized the blessings were genuine when Bileam finished speaking and was shocked to hear Bileam wishing for himself a future like an Israelite, indicating the blessings came from the heart (Ibn Ezra, Targum Jonathan on Numbers 23:11).

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| וַיַּ֖עַן וַיֹּאמַ֑ר הֲלֹ֗א אֵת֩ אֲשֶׁ֨ר יָשִׂ֤ים יְהֹוָה֙ בְּפִ֔י אֹת֥וֹ אֶשְׁמֹ֖ר לְדַבֵּֽר׃ | 12 | He replied, “I can only repeat faithfully what יהוה puts in my mouth.” |

Bileam acknowledges that he must speak only what God puts in his mouth, indicating that he is not free to refuse to speak blessings. Despite the restrictions placed on him by God, Bileam considered it a privilege to be God’s mouthpiece and looked forward to speaking God’s holy words even under duress. (Targum)

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| וַיֹּ֨אמֶר אֵלָ֜יו בָּלָ֗ק נָּ֨א אִתִּ֜י אֶל־מָק֤וֹם אַחֵר֙ אֲשֶׁ֣ר תִּרְאֶ֣נּוּ מִשָּׁ֔ם אֶ֚פֶס קָצֵ֣הוּ תִרְאֶ֔ה וְכֻלּ֖וֹ לֹ֣א תִרְאֶ֑ה וְקׇבְנוֹ־לִ֖י מִשָּֽׁם׃ | 13 | Then Balak said to him, “Come with me to another place from which you can see them—you will see only a portion of them; you will not see all of them—and damn them for me from there.” |

Balak asks Balaam to curse the Israelites from a specific vantage point to target only a portion of them, hoping to exploit a moment of weakness while God is angry with the Israelites. This strategy is reminiscent of Pharaoh’s misunderstanding of Israel’s savior’s location leading to a cruel decree. In order for a curse to be effective, the one bestowing it must see the party clearly, as illustrated in Numbers and Kings, and Balak believed that by showing Balaam different parts of the camp, he could effectively curse them.

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| וַיִּקָּחֵ֙הוּ֙ שְׂדֵ֣ה צֹפִ֔ים אֶל־רֹ֖אשׁ הַפִּסְגָּ֑ה וַיִּ֙בֶן֙ שִׁבְעָ֣ה מִזְבְּחֹ֔ת וַיַּ֛עַל פָּ֥ר וָאַ֖יִל בַּמִּזְבֵּֽחַ׃ | 14 | With that, he took him to Sedehzophim, on the summit of Pisgah. He built seven altars and offered a bull and a ram on each altar. |

Chasidut explains that when souls do God’s will, His eyes shine and they can see clearly, known as the “Seers Field,” while failing to do His will leads to dim eyes and a diminished vision, called the “Weepers Field.” Balak took Balaam to the Field of Zophim to curse Israel, but God made Balaam bless them instead. Rashi and the Targum interpret the word “וישקף” in Exodus 14:24 as God looking towards the Egyptians to destroy them, similar to Bil’am looking towards the Field of Tzofim where he built altars and sacrificed animals.

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| וַיֹּ֙אמֶר֙ אֶל־בָּלָ֔ק הִתְיַצֵּ֥ב כֹּ֖ה עַל־עֹלָתֶ֑ךָ וְאָנֹכִ֖י אִקָּ֥רֶה כֹּֽה׃ | 15 | And [Balaam] said to Balak, “Stay here beside your offerings, while I seek a manifestation yonder.” |

Balaam uses a formula to seek divine inspiration, plans to walk until he receives a prophecy, but the Lord restrains his speech when Balak mocks him. Balaam prophesies that God will nullify evil if people repent, Israel is compared to a lion cub reciting Shema to consume demons, and Moses will take revenge on the kings of Midyan. Rashbam and Rashi explain the significance of the word קרי in relation to walking with God and casual meetings, respectively. Targum interpretations vary on whether Balaam or Balak would be called to meet God at the burnt offering.

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| וַיִּקָּ֤ר יְהֹוָה֙ אֶל־בִּלְעָ֔ם וַיָּ֥שֶׂם דָּבָ֖ר בְּפִ֑יו וַיֹּ֛אמֶר שׁ֥וּב אֶל־בָּלָ֖ק וְכֹ֥ה תְדַבֵּֽר׃ | 16 | יהוה became manifest to Balaam and put a word in his mouth, saying, “Return to Balak and speak thus.” |

Balaam’s attempts to curse Israel were thwarted by God’s mercy, leading him to prophesy blessings instead. Despite his reluctance, God compelled Balaam to return to Balak by placing a word in his mouth. The Midrash emphasizes the influence of God on Balaam’s words and the importance of repentance. Rabbeinu Bahya highlights the exclusivity of certain gifts for the Jewish people, including prophecy, Torah, and resurrection. Adonoy appeared to Balaam in the Targum, instructing him to return to Balak and deliver a message.

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| וַיָּבֹ֣א אֵלָ֗יו וְהִנּ֤וֹ נִצָּב֙ עַל־עֹ֣לָת֔וֹ וְשָׂרֵ֥י מוֹאָ֖ב אִתּ֑וֹ וַיֹּ֤אמֶר לוֹ֙ בָּלָ֔ק מַה־דִּבֶּ֖ר יְהֹוָֽה׃ | 17 | He went to him and found him standing beside his offerings, and the Moabite dignitaries with him. Balak asked him, “What did יהוה say?” |

The princes of Moab left Balak when they saw there was no hope, only some remained. Balak’s question to Bilam was derisive, implying he was not in control. Balak mocked Bilam by asking what God said, knowing Bilam claimed to only speak God’s words. Before descending, the soul swears to be righteous, even if perceived as evil, with deceptions and vanities being raised upon the scales in the month of Tishrei. Balaam is restrained by God, who controls his speech, leading him to bless Israel instead of cursing them. Balak mocks Balaam, who rebukes him for sitting while God’s words are being spoken. When Balak returned, he found himself standing next to his burnt offering with the Moavite dignitaries. Balak then asked Onkelos what the Lord had said.

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| וַיִּשָּׂ֥א מְשָׁל֖וֹ וַיֹּאמַ֑ר ק֤וּם בָּלָק֙ וּֽשְׁמָ֔ע הַאֲזִ֥ינָה עָדַ֖י בְּנ֥וֹ צִפֹּֽר׃ | 18 | And he took up his theme, and said: Up, Balak, attend, Give ear unto me, son of Zippor! |

The line “arise Balak and listen!” in Numbers 23:18 is explained in Chasidut as a way to undermine any curse against Israel by emphasizing the importance of standing and listening to blessings that could be interpreted as curses. In Commentary, Bileam’s use of the phrase “son of Zippor” elevated Balak’s status to listen to the words of God, while in Jewish Thought, Moses’ direct and intuitive communication with God contrasted with Bileam’s need for approval. The Midrash discusses various incidents involving Bilam, emphasizing God’s fulfillment of promises and the importance of repentance and Torah wisdom. Rashbam, Rashi, and Chizkuni offer interpretations of specific words and grammatical forms in the text. Targum Jonathan highlights Bil’am speaking a parable to Balak to listen closely to his words.

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| לֹ֣א אִ֥ישׁ אֵל֙ וִֽיכַזֵּ֔ב וּבֶן־אָדָ֖ם וְיִתְנֶחָ֑ם הַה֤וּא אָמַר֙ וְלֹ֣א יַעֲשֶׂ֔ה וְדִבֶּ֖ר וְלֹ֥א יְקִימֶֽנָּה׃ | 19 | God is not human to be capricious, Or mortal to have a change of heart. Would [God] speak and not act, Promise and not fulfill? |

Chasidut emphasizes the effectiveness of prayers from the righteous in influencing God’s actions, highlighting the importance of truth in connecting with God. Commentary contrasts God’s steadfastness with human fallibility, while Halakhah explains the eternal nature of Torah commandments. Jewish Thought discusses Abraham’s misunderstanding of sacrifice, David’s preparations for the temple, and conditions for G-d’s presence on earth. Midrash showcases examples of divine promises fulfilled and explores divine retribution and forgiveness. Musar discusses G-d’s adjustment of Justice with Mercy for the righteous, and Quoting Commentary provides explanations of various biblical verses. Second Temple texts emphasize God’s guidance and punishment, Talmud discusses prayer practices based on Numbers 23:19, and Tanakh and Targum highlight God’s unchanging nature and fulfillment of promises.

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| הִנֵּ֥ה בָרֵ֖ךְ לָקָ֑חְתִּי וּבֵרֵ֖ךְ וְלֹ֥א אֲשִׁיבֶֽנָּה׃ | 20 | My message was to bless: When [God] blesses, I cannot reverse it. |

Balaam cannot reverse the blessing he received from God to bless Israel, as blessings from God cannot be retracted. The Zohar and its commentaries describe Zeir Anpin as the intermediary connecting all forces above and below, rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked. Once a blessing is given by God, it cannot be reversed or withheld from the recipient, specifically in the case of Israel.

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| לֹֽא־הִבִּ֥יט אָ֙וֶן֙ בְּיַעֲקֹ֔ב וְלֹא־רָאָ֥ה עָמָ֖ל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל יְהֹוָ֤ה אֱלֹהָיו֙ עִמּ֔וֹ וּתְרוּעַ֥ת מֶ֖לֶךְ בּֽוֹ׃ | 21 | No harm is in sight for Jacob, No woe in view for Israel. Their God יהוה is with them, And their King’s acclaim in their midst. |

Chasidut emphasizes the importance of guarding against idolatrous thoughts to trust in God and focus on the good, symbolized by the blowing of the shofar. Halakhah advises against reciting verses of Divine retribution on Rosh Hashanah and provides specific guidelines for prayers. Jewish Thought explores the significance of acknowledging God’s majesty before asking for remembrance and freedom in prayers. Kabbalah discusses how Bilaam and Balak cannot harm the Israelites due to divine protection. Liturgy highlights the invulnerability of Israel to curses and the importance of unity among the tribes. Midrash delves into the story of Balaam and Israel, emphasizing the power of blessings and curses. Musar discusses the severity of lashon hara and the importance of reproving rather than flattering, highlighting repentance. Quoting Commentary provides insights from various commentators on God’s reign, repentance, and specific terms in Biblical verses. Talmud discusses differing opinions on reciting verses of Kingship and Shofarot, and reasons for not reciting the chapter of Balaq and Balaam daily. Targum emphasizes that there are no idol worshippers among the Israelites and that they are protected by the Word of the Lord.

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| אֵ֖ל מוֹצִיאָ֣ם מִמִּצְרָ֑יִם כְּתוֹעֲפֹ֥ת רְאֵ֖ם לֽוֹ׃ | 22 | God who freed them from Egypt Is for them like the horns of the wild ox. |

Chasidut explains that Bileam had to retract his statement about Israel’s exodus from Egypt, emphasizing the merits of the patriarchs. Commentary highlights God’s power in bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, showing mercy to the Canaanites. Halakhah condemns foreign worship and urges believers to have perfect faith in God. Midrash recounts divine intervention and protection of Israel, while Talmud discusses reciting verses for protection and debates on blessings in prayers. Targum emphasizes God’s strength in the exodus from Egypt.

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| כִּ֤י לֹא־נַ֙חַשׁ֙ בְּיַעֲקֹ֔ב וְלֹא־קֶ֖סֶם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל כָּעֵ֗ת יֵאָמֵ֤ר לְיַעֲקֹב֙ וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל מַה־פָּ֖עַל אֵֽל׃ | 23 | Lo, there is no augury in Jacob, No divining in Israel: Jacob is told at once, Yea Israel, what God has planned. |

In the future, righteous Tzaddikim may be called by the name “El,” as hinted in Numbers 23:23, and divination and magic are forbidden as Israel’s close connection to God ensures they do not need such practices (Chasidut). The commandment against divination is rooted in the belief that it leads people away from faith in God and His Torah, and true wisdom lies in trusting in God without seeking signs or omens (Halakhah). Bilaam acknowledges that Jacob and his descendants are protected from enchantment and divination, and prophecy was limited to Israel after the Tabernacle was erected (Kabbalah, Midrash). Israel’s spiritual ascension surpasses that of angels, as exemplified by Dovid HaMelech neutralizing Bilaam’s sorcery and avoiding sorcery allows access to a high spiritual level in the World to Come (Musar). Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi warns against divination, emphasizing the importance of not wasting time on frivolous activities, and instead focusing on studying Torah (Talmud). Do not practice divination or consult with spirits, but listen to the prophet that God will raise up from among your own people, like Moses (Tanakh). Sorcery and occult powers have no effect on the house of Jacob or Israel, as God’s miracles and wonders will be acknowledged in due time (Targum).

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| הֶן־עָם֙ כְּלָבִ֣יא יָק֔וּם וְכַאֲרִ֖י יִתְנַשָּׂ֑א לֹ֤א יִשְׁכַּב֙ עַד־יֹ֣אכַל טֶ֔רֶף וְדַם־חֲלָלִ֖ים יִשְׁתֶּֽה׃ | 24 | Lo, a people that rises like a lioness, Leaps up like a lion, Rests not till it has feasted on prey And drunk the blood of the slain. |

Chasidut discusses serving the Lord without expectation of rewards, likening it to being able to help restore fallen beings and providing satisfaction to the Creator. Balaam’s prophecy about the Israelites rising like a lion is interpreted in various ways by commentators, emphasizing their valiance and conquest. Halakhah establishes specific times for reciting the Shema, a Torah obligation for men based on the daily sacrifices. Midrash recounts stories of God’s protection of Israel and the downfall of enemies, highlighting the power of repentance and reciting the Shema. The Talmud discusses ritual impurity related to blood, tears, and milk, while the chapter of Balaq and Balaam is not recited daily. Targum interpretations of Numbers 23:24 emphasize the strength and fierceness of the Israelites likened to lions.

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| וַיֹּ֤אמֶר בָּלָק֙ אֶל־בִּלְעָ֔ם גַּם־קֹ֖ב לֹ֣א תִקֳּבֶ֑נּוּ גַּם־בָּרֵ֖ךְ לֹ֥א תְבָרְכֶֽנּוּ׃ | 25 | Thereupon Balak said to Balaam, “Don’t curse them and don’t bless them!” |

Balak told Bileam not to curse or bless the Israelites because he feared Bileam might try to bless them after failing to curse them, believing his blessings were insincere and forced by God.

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| וַיַּ֣עַן בִּלְעָ֔ם וַיֹּ֖אמֶר אֶל־בָּלָ֑ק הֲלֹ֗א דִּבַּ֤רְתִּי אֵלֶ֙יךָ֙ לֵאמֹ֔ר כֹּ֛ל אֲשֶׁר־יְדַבֵּ֥ר יְהֹוָ֖ה אֹת֥וֹ אֶֽעֱשֶֽׂה׃ | 26 | In reply, Balaam said to Balak, “But I told you: Whatever יהוה says, that I must do.” |

Bil’am emphasizes to Balak that he will only speak what God commands him to, highlighting the importance of submission to God’s will in true communion with Him (Bemidbar 23:26).

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| וַיֹּ֤אמֶר בָּלָק֙ אֶל־בִּלְעָ֔ם לְכָה־נָּא֙ אֶקָּ֣חֲךָ֔ אֶל־מָק֖וֹם אַחֵ֑ר אוּלַ֤י יִישַׁר֙ בְּעֵינֵ֣י הָאֱלֹהִ֔ים וְקַבֹּ֥תוֹ לִ֖י מִשָּֽׁם׃ | 27 | Then Balak said to Balaam, “Come now, I will take you to another place. Perhaps God will deem it right that you damn them for me there.” |

Balak suggests relocating to curse the Israelites in hopes it will be more suitable to God, believing there are sinners among them deserving of a curse. Balak seeks to overcome the Israelites after Balaam’s prophecy of their conquest, wanting to inflict losses on them out of fear or to reconquer land taken from Moab (Onkelos Numbers 23:27, Targum Jonathan on Numbers 23:27).

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| וַיִּקַּ֥ח בָּלָ֖ק אֶת־בִּלְעָ֑ם רֹ֣אשׁ הַפְּע֔וֹר הַנִּשְׁקָ֖ף עַל־פְּנֵ֥י הַיְשִׁימֹֽן׃ | 28 | Balak took Balaam to the peak of Peor, which overlooks the wasteland. |

Balak took Bilam to the top of Peor to pronounce a curse, believing it would be effective, but Rashi suggests he acted under God’s influence. Mentioning the name of idolatry is forbidden except in Holy Books, and causing others to swear with it is prohibited according to Rambam. Ibn Ezra interprets the symbolic meaning of “seven” in Leviticus 26:18:1, as seen in other biblical examples. Balak brought Bilam to Pe’or overlooking the Yeshimon, or Beth Jeshimoth, according to Targum.

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| וַיֹּ֤אמֶר בִּלְעָם֙ אֶל־בָּלָ֔ק בְּנֵה־לִ֥י בָזֶ֖ה שִׁבְעָ֣ה מִזְבְּחֹ֑ת וְהָכֵ֥ן לִי֙ בָּזֶ֔ה שִׁבְעָ֥ה פָרִ֖ים וְשִׁבְעָ֥ה אֵילִֽם׃ | 29 | Balaam said to Balak, “Build me here seven altars, and have seven bulls and seven rams ready for me here.” |

Chasidut explains that Moses’ prophecy focused on holiness of matter while Bileam’s focused on the peels around it, with Moses using reversals for sanctity and Bileam for negativity. Bileam hinted at changing G’d’s mind through altars, but was thwarted by G’d from using this power, as seen when Balak delayed following Bileam’s blessings with sacrifices. (Chasidut, Commentary, Targum)

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| וַיַּ֣עַשׂ בָּלָ֔ק כַּאֲשֶׁ֖ר אָמַ֣ר בִּלְעָ֑ם וַיַּ֛עַל פָּ֥ר וָאַ֖יִל בַּמִּזְבֵּֽחַ׃ | 30 | Balak did as Balaam said: he offered up a bull and a ram on each altar. |

Balak followed Bilam’s instructions and sacrificed a bull and a ram on each of the seven altars, as Balaam sought to cleave to God’s will and prevent Balak from causing the sacrifices to be rejected. The singular pronoun “he” in the text may refer to either Balaam or Balak offering the sacrifices.

## Numbers 24

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| וַיַּ֣רְא בִּלְעָ֗ם כִּ֣י ט֞וֹב בְּעֵינֵ֤י יְהֹוָה֙ לְבָרֵ֣ךְ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל וְלֹא־הָלַ֥ךְ כְּפַֽעַם־בְּפַ֖עַם לִקְרַ֣את נְחָשִׁ֑ים וַיָּ֥שֶׁת אֶל־הַמִּדְבָּ֖ר פָּנָֽיו׃ | 1 | Now Balaam, seeing that it pleased יהוה to bless Israel, did not, as on previous occasions, go in search of omens, but turned his face toward the wilderness. |

Balaam abandoned attempts to curse Israel through enchantments, sought divine communication in the wilderness, prophesied blessings, and pleased God by not seeking enchantments. The Zohar discusses the positive and negative aspects of divine spirits, Laban and Balaam’s use of enchantments, and the failure of unholy spirits to uproot Israel. The Midrash contrasts the sight of the wicked and the righteous, emphasizing the importance of vision in spiritual matters. In Parshat Kedoshim, the warning against consulting impure spirits is highlighted through Balaam’s actions, raising questions about his motivations. Ramban explains the prohibition against sorcery and divination to maintain the natural order, with Balaam’s ability to prophesy attributed to God’s mercy towards Israel. The Talmud mentions the ten trials of our ancestors, including the Golden Calf incident and Aaron’s response, emphasizing the severity of Israel’s punishment for this sin. Bil’am recognized the need to bless Israel before the Lord and refrained from sorcery, turning towards the wilderness to remember their sin with the calf.

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| וַיִּשָּׂ֨א בִלְעָ֜ם אֶת־עֵינָ֗יו וַיַּרְא֙ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל שֹׁכֵ֖ן לִשְׁבָטָ֑יו וַתְּהִ֥י עָלָ֖יו ר֥וּחַ אֱלֹהִֽים׃ | 2 | As Balaam looked up and saw Israel encamped tribe by tribe, the spirit of God came upon him. |

Balaam praised the Israelites for their unity and spiritual discipline, leading him to bless them instead of cursing. The Divine Presence rested upon them due to their privacy and alignment of their tents. The Spirit of God represented prophetic inspiration in the Bible, seen in individuals like Balaam, Saul, Azariah, and Zechariah. Pinchas’ act of zealotry restored the covenant with God, linking him to the prophet Elijah. The Torah prohibits opening entrances or windows directly into a courtyard belonging to partners for privacy reasons.

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| וַיִּשָּׂ֥א מְשָׁל֖וֹ וַיֹּאמַ֑ר נְאֻ֤ם בִּלְעָם֙ בְּנ֣וֹ בְעֹ֔ר וּנְאֻ֥ם הַגֶּ֖בֶר שְׁתֻ֥ם הָעָֽיִן׃ | 3 | Taking up his theme, he said: Word of Balaam son of Beor, Word of the man whose eye is true, |

The concept of elevating fallen “sparks” without expecting reward and the negative eyesight of Bilaam are discussed in Chasidut. Various commentators interpret Balaam’s abilities and actions differently, with some suggesting his blessings were actually curses. Maimonides explains the exclusivity of prophecy to the Jewish people, contrasting Balaam’s role as more of an astrologer. In Kabbalah, Bilaam’s evil eye is highlighted as a destructive force. Bilam’s wickedness and failed attempts to curse Israel are described in Midrash, while Talmud and Targum offer insights into his lineage and physical disabilities. Mishnah discusses the prohibition of wine if left unattended by a Jew and a gentile, and Musar reflects on the significance of prayer and the Temple’s destruction.

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| נְאֻ֕ם שֹׁמֵ֖עַ אִמְרֵי־אֵ֑ל אֲשֶׁ֨ר מַחֲזֵ֤ה שַׁדַּי֙ יֶֽחֱזֶ֔ה נֹפֵ֖ל וּגְל֥וּי עֵינָֽיִם׃ | 4 | Word of one who hears God’s speech, Who beholds visions from the Almighty, Prostrate, but with eyes unveiled: |

Chasidut explains that Bileam’s interaction with the angel of the Lord was a warning from God to deter him from his evil intentions, indicating that he had already forfeited his life by his actions. Jewish Thought contrasts Moses and Bileam in terms of their relationship with God and ability to communicate divine messages, emphasizing Moses’ superiority. Midrash discusses the differences in prophecies between Moses and Bileam, while quoting commentary highlights the contrast between their encounters with God. The Talmud presents various interpretations of Balaam’s actions, including divination and bestiality. Targum emphasizes the reverence and knowledge granted to prophets receiving divine messages.

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| מַה־טֹּ֥בוּ אֹהָלֶ֖יךָ יַעֲקֹ֑ב מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶ֖יךָ יִשְׂרָאֵֽל׃ | 5 | How fair are your tents, O Jacob, Your dwellings, O Israel! |

The text discusses the importance of setting aside specific hours for Torah study, distinguishing between the spiritual levels of Yaakov and Israel based on the frequency of Torah study, Balaam’s blessing of “How goodly are your tents, Jacob” reveals his desire for the Temple to have been built in Jacob’s merit to spare the Jewish people from destruction, and the significance of Torah academies and synagogues. The beit din did not recognize the civil building authority’s decision to authorize a building due to it contradicting a fundamental Torah value of hezeik re’iyah, highlighting the importance of visual trespass awareness. Balak sought Bileam’s curses to defeat Israel, but Bileam’s attempt to curse them failed, leading to his humiliation, contrasting with Eldad Hadani’s testimony of the greatness of the Ten Lost Tribes. The Liturgy focuses on the verse “How good are your tents, Jacob: your dwelling places, Israel,” interpreting it as a reference to Jewish houses of study and worship, as well as forms of worship and a prayer for God’s kindness. Rashbam, Rabbeinu Bahya, Rashi, and Da’at Zekenim provide insights on Balaam’s blessings, Israel’s refinement, the Tabernacle’s self-erection, the importance of accepting rebukes, and the connection between the Shechinah and the Jewish people. Rabbi Yoḥanan explains that Balaam’s blessings towards the Israelites actually reveal his intentions to curse them, praising their synagogues, the Divine presence, the continuity of the kingdom of Israel, their abundance of olive trees and vineyards, and the fragrance of their mitzvot. The Targum commentary on Numbers 24:5 praises the tents and dwelling places of the Israelites, highlighting their beauty and significance in relation to their ancestors and their worship of God.

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| כִּנְחָלִ֣ים נִטָּ֔יוּ כְּגַנֹּ֖ת עֲלֵ֣י נָהָ֑ר כַּאֲהָלִים֙ נָטַ֣ע יְהֹוָ֔ה כַּאֲרָזִ֖ים עֲלֵי־מָֽיִם׃ | 6 | Like palm-groves that stretch out, Like gardens beside a river, Like aloes planted by יהוה, Like cedars beside the water; |

Balaam’s blessings in Numbers 24:6 compare the Jewish people to brooks, tents, aloes, and cedars, symbolizing different groups of righteous individuals within the community and highlighting the importance of Torah study, material support for scholars, and the sanctity of the Israelites. The brain holds blessings, the heart holds holiness, and the lung holds unity, combining to bring peace. R. Chama explains that tents near streams symbolize the purification of an impure man through Torah study. Rashi explains that comparisons made by Bileam were inserted by the שכינה to remove negative connotations, and synagogues are likened to brooks for purification. Rabbi Yoḥanan interprets Balaam’s blessings as highlighting positive aspects of the Jewish people, emphasizing the importance of humility and Torah study. The Targum translations of Numbers 24:6 emphasize the power, endurance, and beauty of the house of Israel.

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| יִֽזַּל־מַ֙יִם֙ מִדָּ֣לְיָ֔ו וְזַרְע֖וֹ בְּמַ֣יִם רַבִּ֑ים וְיָרֹ֤ם מֵֽאֲגַג֙ מַלְכּ֔וֹ וְתִנַּשֵּׂ֖א מַלְכֻתֽוֹ׃ | 7 | Their boughs drip with moisture, Their roots have abundant water. Their ruler shall rise above Agag, Their sovereignty shall be exalted. |

Chasidut emphasizes drawing Torah through nullification to Hashem’s will and connecting to the source, while also discussing the connection between Hanukkah candles and the name Ehyeh. Mei HaShiloach explores Bilaam’s attempt to curse Israel and the impact of exile on the Jewish people’s connection to the Torah. Liturgy in Siddur Sefard for Sukkot includes prayers for salvation invoking biblical figures, and Midrash warns of consequences of uncleanliness and advises studying Torah in company. Commentary explains Balaam’s prophecies regarding Israel’s kings and prosperity, while Talmud discusses characteristics of future Jewish kings. Tanakh mentions King Saul capturing King Agag of Amalek, and Targum predicts the rise of a greater king than Agag from the house of Amalek.

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| אֵ֚ל מוֹצִיא֣וֹ מִמִּצְרַ֔יִם כְּתוֹעֲפֹ֥ת רְאֵ֖ם ל֑וֹ יֹאכַ֞ל גּוֹיִ֣ם צָרָ֗יו וְעַצְמֹתֵיהֶ֛ם יְגָרֵ֖ם וְחִצָּ֥יו יִמְחָֽץ׃ | 8 | God who freed them from Egypt Is for them like the horns of the wild ox. They shall devour enemy nations, Crush their bones, And smash their arrows. |

Chasidut highlights God’s intervention for the oppressed Israelites, contrasting with Bileam’s punishment for cruelty. Commentary discusses the future defeat of Israel’s adversaries and the significance of the term “arrows.” Jewish Thought explores the hierarchy of nourishment, Israel’s moral superiority, and consequences of disobedience. Midrash shows God’s command prevailing over human resistance. Quoting Commentary explains various verses, while Talmud discusses Solomon’s encounter with Ashmedai and reasons for not reciting the chapter of Balaq and Balaam daily. Targum emphasizes God’s strength in delivering the Israelites and defeating their enemies.

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| כָּרַ֨ע שָׁכַ֧ב כַּאֲרִ֛י וּכְלָבִ֖יא מִ֣י יְקִימֶ֑נּוּ מְבָרְכֶ֣יךָ בָר֔וּךְ וְאֹרְרֶ֖יךָ אָרֽוּר׃ | 9 | They crouch, they lie down like a lion, Like a lioness; who dares rouse them? Blessed are they who bless you, Accursed they who curse you! |

Bileam praises Jewish strength and might, compares them to lions, warns of blessings and curses; Midrash discusses nations blessing Judah, lineage significance, and Messiah prophecy; Commentary notes Balaam’s blessings to Israel, Talmud debates divination methods, and Tanakh promises blessings for those who bless Abraham. The Targum emphasizes Israel’s strength like a lion and the consequences of blessing and cursing.

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| וַיִּֽחַר־אַ֤ף בָּלָק֙ אֶל־בִּלְעָ֔ם וַיִּסְפֹּ֖ק אֶת־כַּפָּ֑יו וַיֹּ֨אמֶר בָּלָ֜ק אֶל־בִּלְעָ֗ם לָקֹ֤ב אֹֽיְבַי֙ קְרָאתִ֔יךָ וְהִנֵּה֙ בֵּרַ֣כְתָּ בָרֵ֔ךְ זֶ֖ה שָׁלֹ֥שׁ פְּעָמִֽים׃ | 10 | Enraged at Balaam, Balak struck his hands together. “I called you,” Balak said to Balaam, “to damn my enemies, and instead you have blessed them these three times! |

In Numbers 24:10, Rashi interprets “ויספק” as clapping hands, Sforno sees it as a sign of abandoning hope, Or HaChaim states it as expressing anger, and Ibn Ezra compares it to Lamentations 2:15. Balak’s anger was due to Bileam blessing Israel instead of cursing them as requested. Moses added a seventh blessing to the Israelites, surpassing Balaam’s three blessings, as he had risked his life for them. Rabbeinu Bahya explains that Moses completed the four blessings omitted by Bileam. The Talmud prohibits clapping hands in anger, citing Balak’s example. Balak’s anger towards Bileam for blessing his enemies instead of cursing them is mentioned in Onkelos Numbers 24:10.

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| וְעַתָּ֖ה בְּרַח־לְךָ֣ אֶל־מְקוֹמֶ֑ךָ אָמַ֙רְתִּי֙ כַּבֵּ֣ד אֲכַבֶּדְךָ֔ וְהִנֵּ֛ה מְנָעֲךָ֥ יְהֹוָ֖ה מִכָּבֽוֹד׃ | 11 | Back with you at once to your own place! I was going to reward you richly, but יהוה has denied you the reward.” |

Chasidut discusses sins committed deliberately versus out of weakness, using Jerusalem’s exile as an example and linking ritual impurity to redemption. Commentary highlights God’s will cannot be changed, Kabbalah discusses the concept of fragrances not staying in one place. Musar emphasizes the existence of a single original Cause, God, as a fundamental truth. Talmud teaches about respecting friends for the right reasons, seen in the cases of Bil’am and Moses. Targum mentions Balaam being prevented from receiving promised honor.

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| וַיֹּ֥אמֶר בִּלְעָ֖ם אֶל־בָּלָ֑ק הֲלֹ֗א גַּ֧ם אֶל־מַלְאָכֶ֛יךָ אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַ֥חְתָּ אֵלַ֖י דִּבַּ֥רְתִּי לֵאמֹֽר׃ | 12 | Balaam replied to Balak, “But I even told the messengers you sent to me, |

Balaam defended himself to Balak by referring to his previous conversation with Balak’s messengers, where he indicated he could not go beyond God’s word. However, he still misled Balak by implying he was willing to curse the people until the angel warned him. Bilam clarified to Balak that his refusal was not due to lack of honor or power, as he had explained to the messengers previously. Bil’am reminds Balak that he had previously warned his messengers about the limitations of his abilities.

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| אִם־יִתֶּן־לִ֨י בָלָ֜ק מְלֹ֣א בֵיתוֹ֮ כֶּ֣סֶף וְזָהָב֒ לֹ֣א אוּכַ֗ל לַעֲבֹר֙ אֶת־פִּ֣י יְהֹוָ֔ה לַעֲשׂ֥וֹת טוֹבָ֛ה א֥וֹ רָעָ֖ה מִלִּבִּ֑י אֲשֶׁר־יְדַבֵּ֥ר יְהֹוָ֖ה אֹת֥וֹ אֲדַבֵּֽר׃ | 13 | ‘Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not of my own accord do anything good or bad contrary to יהוה’s command. What יהוה says, that I must say.’ |

Balaam, representing evil, acknowledges God’s knowledge but refuses to transgress God’s word despite Balak’s offers of riches. Balaam can only speak what God instructs him to say, as he is aware of being banished from God’s presence if he disobeys. (Chasidut, Commentary, Targum)

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| וְעַתָּ֕ה הִנְנִ֥י הוֹלֵ֖ךְ לְעַמִּ֑י לְכָה֙ אִיעָ֣צְךָ֔ אֲשֶׁ֨ר יַעֲשֶׂ֜ה הָעָ֥ם הַזֶּ֛ה לְעַמְּךָ֖ בְּאַחֲרִ֥ית הַיָּמִֽים׃ | 14 | And now, as I go back to my people, let me inform you of what this people will do to your people in days to come.” |

Balaam advised Balak to use Moabite women to seduce Israel into sin, reassuring him with a prophecy of Israel’s future victory. The Torah emphasizes choosing life for eternal life and the pre-creation planning of key elements. The Midrash discusses handwashing, observing minor commandments, and God’s concealment of secrets. The Zohar discusses the Torah sustaining during exile until the return to Israel, while Balaam’s prophecy refers to Israel avenging itself in the end of days. Sforno, Rashi, Ramban, and Da’at Zekenim provide insights on various biblical passages, while the Talmud reflects on Balaam’s fate and the importance of careful words. Targum Jonathan and Targum Jerusalem recount Balaam’s advice to Balak to lead Israel into sin through seduction, leading to their downfall but eventual victory.

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| וַיִּשָּׂ֥א מְשָׁל֖וֹ וַיֹּאמַ֑ר נְאֻ֤ם בִּלְעָם֙ בְּנ֣וֹ בְעֹ֔ר וּנְאֻ֥ם הַגֶּ֖בֶר שְׁתֻ֥ם הָעָֽיִן׃ | 15 | He took up his theme, and said: Word of Balaam son of Beor, Word of the man whose eye is true, |

Balaam presents himself as a prophet with knowledge of God’s intentions for the end of days, boasting of his understanding of divine visions. In contrast to Moses, Balaam did not have the same level of prophetic qualities, but he did possess the ability to know when God would speak to him. The Targum emphasizes Balaam’s claim to have unique insights and revelations hidden from other prophets.

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| נְאֻ֗ם שֹׁמֵ֙עַ֙ אִמְרֵי־אֵ֔ל וְיֹדֵ֖עַ דַּ֣עַת עֶלְי֑וֹן מַחֲזֵ֤ה שַׁדַּי֙ יֶֽחֱזֶ֔ה נֹפֵ֖ל וּגְל֥וּי עֵינָֽיִם׃ | 16 | Word of one who hears God’s speech, Who obtains knowledge from the Most High, And beholds visions from the Almighty, Prostrate, but with eyes unveiled: |

Chasidut explains that Bilaam represents the evil aspect of Nogah, with deep knowledge of God’s anger and Daat, requiring the separation of holy sparks through Torah study and mitzvot. The Midrash contrasts Moses and Bilaam’s prophecy, highlighting Bilaam’s misleading wisdom and harmful influence. Musar describes Bilaam as a wicked man who misled others with false claims of prophetic insight. Rambam contrasts the discipleship of Abraham and Balaam, emphasizing the rewards of following Abraham’s ways. In the Second Temple text, Balaam is known as a dealer in augury who claimed to know the knowledge of the Most High. The Talmud criticizes Balaam for claiming knowledge of God while not even understanding his own animal’s thoughts. King Melchizedek blessed Abram, and the Targum emphasizes Bilaam’s unique prophetic abilities and foreknowledge of his fate.

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| אֶרְאֶ֙נּוּ֙ וְלֹ֣א עַתָּ֔ה אֲשׁוּרֶ֖נּוּ וְלֹ֣א קָר֑וֹב דָּרַ֨ךְ כּוֹכָ֜ב מִֽיַּעֲקֹ֗ב וְקָ֥ם שֵׁ֙בֶט֙ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵ֔ל וּמָחַץ֙ פַּאֲתֵ֣י מוֹאָ֔ב וְקַרְקַ֖ר כׇּל־בְּנֵי־שֵֽׁת׃ | 17 | What I see for them is not yet, What I behold will not be soon: A star rises from Jacob, A scepter comes forth from Israel; It smashes the brow of Moab, The foundation of all children of Seth. |

The text discusses Balaam’s prophecy of a star and scepter emerging from Israel, symbolizing the Messiah’s future dominion over all nations and the renewal of the Davidic dynasty. It also explores the significance of the 22 letters of the aleph bet, the blessings bestowed upon the tribes of Israel, and the role of Mashiach ben Yosef in preparing for Mashiach ben David. Additionally, it delves into the importance of prayer, divine providence, and the eventual restoration of the Temple and observance of statutes under the Messianic king.

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| וְהָיָ֨ה אֱד֜וֹם יְרֵשָׁ֗ה וְהָיָ֧ה יְרֵשָׁ֛ה שֵׂעִ֖יר אֹיְבָ֑יו וְיִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל עֹ֥שֶׂה חָֽיִל׃ | 18 | Edom becomes a possession, Yea, Seir a possession of its enemies; But Israel is triumphant. |

Chasidut explains the division of the world between Jacob and Esau, with Jacob asking God for sustenance to prevent gentiles from mocking God’s power. Balaam’s prophecy discusses Israel’s success in preventing mockery by the gentiles. Commentary discusses the defeat of Edom by the Messiah, with Seir becoming a possession of Israel. Halakhah mentions the renewal of the Davidic dynasty by the Messianic king. Musar highlights Abraham as a positive force, with Ishmael and Esau representing negativity. Quoting Commentary provides various interpretations of wealth and success in Jewish texts. Targum discusses Edom’s defeat and Israel’s triumph in Numbers 24:18.

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| וְיֵ֖רְדְּ מִֽיַּעֲקֹ֑ב וְהֶֽאֱבִ֥יד שָׂרִ֖יד מֵעִֽיר׃ | 19 | A victor issues from Jacob To wipe out what is left of Ir. |

Numbers 24:19 foretells the rise of King Messiah from Jacob, the destruction of Rome and the downfall of the Roman Empire, ushering in the age of the Messiah. In Kabbalah, the righteous who repented will rise early from the dust, with different opinions on the timing of their revival. The Midrash discusses prophecy among idol worshipers, the benefits of the Tent of Meeting, and the fate of Israel and its enemies. Tur HaArokh explains that Esau will lose dominance to Jacob due to the failure of Jacob’s descendants to uphold their covenant with G’d, as predicted in Numbers 24:19. The Targum predicts the rise of a ruler from the house of Jacob who will destroy the survivors of a rebellious city.

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| וַיַּרְא֙ אֶת־עֲמָלֵ֔ק וַיִּשָּׂ֥א מְשָׁל֖וֹ וַיֹּאמַ֑ר רֵאשִׁ֤ית גּוֹיִם֙ עֲמָלֵ֔ק וְאַחֲרִית֖וֹ עֲדֵ֥י אֹבֵֽד׃ | 20 | He saw Amalek and, taking up his theme, he said: A leading nation is Amalek; But its fate is to perish forever. |

The text discusses the importance of finding renewal in each day through individual work, focusing on the interdependence of space, time, and soul, linking it to the concept of purifying creation and subjugating it to holiness. The battle between Israel and Amalek symbolizes the ongoing struggle between good and evil, with God ultimately ensuring the triumph of righteousness. The punishment of Amalek is foretold by G’d and will be carried out by the Messiah in the messianic era. The Torah emphasizes the command to remember what Amalek did to Israel when they left Egypt, serving as a reminder of their evil disposition. The significance of the name Ya"h-י״ה in relation to the battle against Amalek is discussed in the Kabbalah, with prophets prophesizing about HaShem’s ultimate victory over all nations, including Amalek. Rabbeinu Bahya explains that God will first blot out Amalek under heaven, and then it is the Jewish people’s turn to blot out Amalek’s memory on earth, contrasting Amalek’s strategy of preying on the weak with the absence of fear of God. God promises peace to those whose minds he grants it to, by blotting out the memory of Amalek from under heaven, and in Psalms 9:6, it is stated that God punishes the nations, destroys the wicked, and erases their name forever. Bil’am prophesied that Amalek will ultimately face total destruction in the end times.

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| וַיַּרְא֙ אֶת־הַקֵּינִ֔י וַיִּשָּׂ֥א מְשָׁל֖וֹ וַיֹּאמַ֑ר אֵיתָן֙ מֽוֹשָׁבֶ֔ךָ וְשִׂ֥ים בַּסֶּ֖לַע קִנֶּֽךָ׃ | 21 | He saw the Kenites and, taking up his theme, he said: Though your abode be secure, And your nest be set among cliffs, |

Chasidut discusses the juxtaposition of the Kenites and Amalek in the Torah, highlighting the enduring nature of Torah teachings and the support provided by Yeshivah study to converts. Commentary emphasizes Balaam’s advice to the Kenites to separate from Amalek and foretells their future redemption. Kabbalah delves into the mystical significance of various symbols and teachings in the Tikkunei Zohar. Midrash explores the blessings received by Yitro, his association with Moses, and the creation of the world. Quoting Commentary connects the Kenite tribe to various Biblical figures and promises of land. Talmud discusses the term “eitan” and its interpretations, while Tanakh and Targum provide additional context on the Kenites in scripture.

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| כִּ֥י אִם־יִהְיֶ֖ה לְבָ֣עֵֽר קָ֑יִן עַד־מָ֖ה אַשּׁ֥וּר תִּשְׁבֶּֽךָּ׃ | 22 | Yet shall Kain be consumed, When Asshur takes you captive. |

Bileam reassures the Kenites of their temporary exile by Assyria, contrasting their fate with Amalek’s annihilation. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai predicts a great war between East and West, leading to the Messiah’s arrival. Mocking others shows pride and lack of humility, condemned in Proverbs. Ibn Ezra explains “u-vi’arta” as “so thou shalt put away.” Targum translations of Numbers 24:22 suggest the Shalmites will be despoiled by Ashur in the future.

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| וַיִּשָּׂ֥א מְשָׁל֖וֹ וַיֹּאמַ֑ר א֕וֹי מִ֥י יִחְיֶ֖ה מִשֻּׂמ֥וֹ אֵֽל׃ | 23 | He took up his theme and said: Alas, who can survive except God has willed it! |

Bileam’s statement in Numbers 24:23 reflects concern about Assyria’s rise and consequences for defying God’s decrees, warning of destruction for nations hosting Israelites. Midrash discusses Israel’s unique relationship with God and the harmful wisdom of Balaam. Quoting Commentary highlights Satan’s interference with the Israelites in the desert and the need for divine intervention to overcome temptation. Responsa emphasizes the importance of unwavering faith despite persecution, using biblical verses to support this. Talmud warns against indulgence in the name of God and hindering the Jewish people’s redemption. Targum warns of God’s vengeance on the wicked and rewards for the righteous.

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| וְצִים֙ מִיַּ֣ד כִּתִּ֔ים וְעִנּ֥וּ אַשּׁ֖וּר וְעִנּוּ־עֵ֑בֶר וְגַם־ה֖וּא עֲדֵ֥י אֹבֵֽד׃ | 24 | Ships come from the quarter of Kittim; They subject Asshur, subject Eber. They, too, shall perish forever. |

The text discusses a prophecy about great ships from the Romans afflicting Assyria and ultimately perishing forever, as foretold by Daniel, with the Romans being vanquished by the Messiah. The current exile is identified with Edom, represented by Rome, and the sin of Edom is remembered in Rome. In the Selichot prayers of various Nusach, there is a plea for deliverance through God’s mercy, referencing Hosea 1:7 and mentioning ships from Kittim. Rashi explains that ציים refers to companies of nobles or legions, and Ibn Ezra identifies Chittim as a distant land, possibly Cyprus. Rav interprets the verse “And ships come from the coast of Kittim” as referring to the Roman legion attacking Assyria, predicting their enslavement of the Jewish people. In Daniel 7:11, the arrogant horn on the beast is killed and its body destroyed. Warships from Kittim/Rome will destroy Ashur and enslave those beyond Peras, but they will also be lost for eternity, with Lombarnia and Italia bringing suffering to Athuraee and Eber, but Meshiha bringing everlasting destruction.

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| וַיָּ֣קׇם בִּלְעָ֔ם וַיֵּ֖לֶךְ וַיָּ֣שׇׁב לִמְקֹמ֑וֹ וְגַם־בָּלָ֖ק הָלַ֥ךְ לְדַרְכּֽוֹ׃ | 25 | Then Balaam set out on his journey back home; and Balak also went his way. |

Balaam’s prophecies led to his departure with head held high, leaving Balak dissatisfied and possibly losing his kingship. Balaam offered evil counsel against Israel without reward, while Israel continued to exist. Balaam prophesied while lying down with his eyes open, and ultimately aligned himself with the five kings of Midian for reward. The plan to curse Israel failed, leading to Balaam blessing them instead, with Balak and Balaam meeting devastating ends as they parted ways. Moses said goodbye to his father-in-law, and Balaam and Balak departed to their respective places after their encounter. Balak followed Balaam’s advice to set up the Midianite daughters to sell sweetmeats at a lower price.

## Numbers 25

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| וַיֵּ֥שֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל בַּשִּׁטִּ֑ים וַיָּ֣חֶל הָעָ֔ם לִזְנ֖וֹת אֶל־בְּנ֥וֹת מוֹאָֽב׃ | 1 | While Israel was staying at Shittim, the menfolk profaned themselves by whoring with the Moabite women, |

The Israelites in Shittim committed harlotry with the daughters of Moab influenced by Balaam, leading to idolatry and severe punishment. The sin of idolatry in Shittim was severe, going from angelic behavior to immorality, and was compared to Lot’s daughters’ actions. Pinehas was necessary to repair the breach of the Holy Covenant caused by immoral acts. The people of Israel were divided at the Red Sea, with some crying out to God while others rebelled. In Shittim, the people’s actions symbolized passions that wound the soul and senses derived from a father, leading to the involvement with the idol Peor. Pinehas would have been executed for killing Zimri if Zimri had separated from the woman before being killed.

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| וַתִּקְרֶ֣אןָ לָעָ֔ם לְזִבְחֵ֖י אֱלֹהֵיהֶ֑ן וַיֹּ֣אכַל הָעָ֔ם וַיִּֽשְׁתַּחֲו֖וּ לֵאלֹֽהֵיהֶֽן׃ | 2 | who invited the menfolk to the sacrifices for their god. The menfolk partook of them and worshiped that god. |

The Israelites were led into idolatry by Moabite women through wine and seduction, ultimately worshipping the idol Baal Peor. Pinchas’ actions restored the covenant with God, emphasizing the importance of chastity and upholding religious beliefs. The Talmud discusses differing opinions on the causes of idol worship, while the Targum highlights the Moabite women’s role in enticing the Israelites into idolatrous practices.

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| וַיִּצָּ֥מֶד יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל לְבַ֣עַל פְּע֑וֹר וַיִּֽחַר־אַ֥ף יְהֹוָ֖ה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵֽל׃ | 3 | Thus Israel attached itself to Baal-peor, and יהוה was incensed with Israel. |

Chasidut emphasizes the importance of having intentions for the sake of G‑d, even if deeds are questionable, as seen in the case of Lot’s daughters. The Israelites’ engagement in immoral acts with Moabite women and worship of Baal-peor led to divine anger, highlighting the significance of maintaining a close relationship with God for the survival of the nation. Moses’ preparation of Joshua to lead Israel into the promised land, warning against straying from God’s commandments, and the consequences of idolatry and harlotry are detailed in the Midrash. The Second Temple commentary describes the Midianites’ unholy rites of Baal Peor, while the Tanakh likens Israel to grapes in the wilderness but notes their turn to shamefulness at Baal-peor. The Targum references Israelites joining Baal Peor, angering the Lord.

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| וַיֹּ֨אמֶר יְהֹוָ֜ה אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֗ה קַ֚ח אֶת־כׇּל־רָאשֵׁ֣י הָעָ֔ם וְהוֹקַ֥ע אוֹתָ֛ם לַיהֹוָ֖ה נֶ֣גֶד הַשָּׁ֑מֶשׁ וְיָשֹׁ֛ב חֲר֥וֹן אַף־יְהֹוָ֖ה מִיִּשְׂרָאֵֽל׃ | 4 | יהוה said to Moses, “Take all the ringleaders and have them publicly impaled before יהוה, so that יהוה’s wrath may turn away from Israel.” |

The leaders of the people were to judge and hang those who worshiped Peor as a public punishment for idolatry, aiming to atone for their sin and sanctify God’s name. The Shophar notes of te-qi’ah, she-varim, and te-ru’ah are used to destroy and break the husks of the nut, symbolizing the smashing of idols. Cases of monetary law are judged by a court of three judges, while cases of capital law are judged by a court of twenty-three judges, with specific procedures for each type of case. Ramban explains the command to slay the worshippers of the calf in Exodus 32:27, while Ibn Ezra connects the prohibition of imprinting marks on the body to the practice of marking oneself for the dead. The Talmud discusses the requirement for capital cases to be judged during the day, and the incident of the Israelites worshipping the idol of Peor, with Phineas taking action to stop the sinful act.

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| וַיֹּ֣אמֶר מֹשֶׁ֔ה אֶל־שֹׁפְטֵ֖י יִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל הִרְגוּ֙ אִ֣ישׁ אֲנָשָׁ֔יו הַנִּצְמָדִ֖ים לְבַ֥עַל פְּעֽוֹר׃ | 5 | So Moses said to Israel’s officials, “Each of you slay those of his men who attached themselves to Baal-peor.” |

Moses commanded the judges of Israel to kill those who worshipped Baal-peor, with conflicting accounts on the number of men executed, ranging from 157,200 to only the guilty judges. Pinchas stopped the plague by killing Zimri and the Midianite woman. The people of Israel were enticed by Moabite women to worship Baal Peor, leading to a significant loss of life among the Israelites. The tribe of Simeon rebelled and engaged in sinful behavior with the Midianites. Phineas took decisive action against the sinners, performing miracles to justify his actions and stop the plague. Psalms 106:28-29 recounts the worship of Baal Peor, resulting in God’s anger and a plague. Moses instructed the judges to kill those who worshipped Baal Peor, with different interpretations in the Targum regarding who should be killed.

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| וְהִנֵּ֡ה אִישׁ֩ מִבְּנֵ֨י יִשְׂרָאֵ֜ל בָּ֗א וַיַּקְרֵ֤ב אֶל־אֶחָיו֙ אֶת־הַמִּדְיָנִ֔ית לְעֵינֵ֣י מֹשֶׁ֔ה וּלְעֵינֵ֖י כׇּל־עֲדַ֣ת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל וְהֵ֣מָּה בֹכִ֔ים פֶּ֖תַח אֹ֥הֶל מוֹעֵֽד׃ | 6 | Just then a certain Israelite man came and brought a Midianite woman over to his companions, in the sight of Moses and of the whole Israelite community who were weeping at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. |

The disagreement between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Joshua over Aaron’s sons’ sin is explained by entering different domains without permission, leading to their death. Zimri brought a Midianite woman near Moses, causing confusion and weeping, resulting in the death of 24,000 Israelites due to idolatry and illicit sex. The prohibition against intermarriage is not explicitly stated in Scripture, but zealots can execute a Jew caught cohabiting with a non-Jewess, as seen in the case of Phinehas and Zimri. The Israelites’ passivity in response to an Israelite man bringing a foreign woman was due to shock and fear of being labeled a hypocrite. Pinḥas’s zealous actions pacified God’s anger and prevented harm to the Israelites. Yehudah’s blessing by Moses was related to success in war, and the appointment of leaders from each tribe highlighted Shimon and Dan’s dishonorable actions in their history. Phineas killed a Jewish man and a Midianite woman engaged in intercourse, leading to six miracles justifying his actions.

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| וַיַּ֗רְא פִּֽינְחָס֙ בֶּן־אֶלְעָזָ֔ר בֶּֽן־אַהֲרֹ֖ן הַכֹּהֵ֑ן וַיָּ֙קׇם֙ מִתּ֣וֹךְ הָֽעֵדָ֔ה וַיִּקַּ֥ח רֹ֖מַח בְּיָדֽוֹ׃ | 7 | When Phinehas, son of Eleazar son of Aaron the priest, saw this, he left the assembly and, taking a spear in his hand, |

Phineas acted zealously by killing sinners, was rewarded with the priestly portions, and performed miracles to stop a deadly pestilence, demonstrating loyalty to God’s commandments. His actions were symbolically linked to the gifts of the priesthood, and he was honored with peace and priesthood for upholding God’s law and preventing internal conflicts. Pinehas’ killing of Zimri with a spear resulted in an eternal covenant of priesthood for him and his descendants, emphasizing the importance of zeal and courage in serving God.

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| וַ֠יָּבֹ֠א אַחַ֨ר אִֽישׁ־יִשְׂרָאֵ֜ל אֶל־הַקֻּבָּ֗ה וַיִּדְקֹר֙ אֶת־שְׁנֵיהֶ֔ם אֵ֚ת אִ֣ישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל וְאֶת־הָאִשָּׁ֖ה אֶל־קֳבָתָ֑הּ וַתֵּֽעָצַר֙ הַמַּגֵּפָ֔ה מֵעַ֖ל בְּנֵ֥י יִשְׂרָאֵֽל׃ | 8 | he followed the Israelite man into the chamber and stabbed both of them, the Israelite man and the woman, through the belly. Then the plague against the Israelites was checked. |

Phineas killed Zimri and Kosbi to stop a plague among the Israelites, justified by their adultery and idolatry. Zealots may attack those who have relations with gentiles, as seen with Phineas and Zimri. The rabbis connect Phineas to controlling passions and emphasize the importance of righteousness. The blessed Holy One uses a symbolic spear to skewer sinners. Phineas’ actions were necessary and praised for stopping a plague and upholding God’s sanctity. The Mishnah discusses slaughtering animals on festivals, and the law regarding sexual relations with a maidservant is compared to death penalties. Phineas’ act was rewarded with priestly gifts and miracles, saving Israel from disaster. The Talmud discusses Phineas becoming a priest and the prohibition against Jews engaging with gentile women as a halakha from Sinai. Phineas performed twelve miracles during the incident, showing his righteousness and causing Heaven’s compassion to intervene.

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| וַיִּהְי֕וּ הַמֵּתִ֖ים בַּמַּגֵּפָ֑ה אַרְבָּעָ֥ה וְעֶשְׂרִ֖ים אָֽלֶף׃ | 9 | Those who died of the plague numbered twenty-four thousand. |

In Numbers 25, Pinhas stops a plague by killing an Israelite man and a Midianite woman, leading to the deaths of twenty-four thousand people. The Liturgy in the Machzor Yom Kippur Ashkenaz emphasizes that God answers the prayers of various biblical figures and righteous individuals. The Midrash highlights the Israelites’ obedience to God’s words and their strength when rising to serve Him. The stories of the pagan prophet Bil’am in Numbers contrast rebellion narratives and focus on curses turned to blessings. In the Talmud, Joshua and Pinehas question why many fell due to sin, emphasizing careful judgment and consequences for actions.

# **54**: וזאת הברכה|V’Zot HaBerachah

Deuteronomy 33:1-34:12

## Deuteronomy 33

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| וְזֹ֣את הַבְּרָכָ֗ה אֲשֶׁ֨ר בֵּרַ֥ךְ מֹשֶׁ֛ה אִ֥ישׁ הָאֱלֹהִ֖ים אֶת־בְּנֵ֣י יִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל לִפְנֵ֖י מוֹתֽוֹ׃ | 1 | This is the blessing with which Moses, God’s agent, bade the Israelites farewell before he died. |

Chasidut emphasizes the importance of humility and fear of the Creator, with Moshe Rabeynu having a unique connection to God that allowed him to speak mouth to mouth with Him. The main service to God is through fervent worship and Torah study done with love and reverence. Halakhah details the Torah portions read during Sukkot and Simchat Torah customs, while Kabbalah highlights the blessing bestowed by Moses on Israel and their connection to the divine. Midrash discusses the blessings given by patriarchs and prophets, with Moses blessing Israel with ‘zot’. Musar contrasts Moses with Noach in terms of their spiritual attainment and relationship with God. Responsa refutes claims linking verses in the Torah to Mohammed and emphasizes that the covenant and blessings are exclusively for the descendants of Isaac and Jacob. Second Temple texts describe Moses as a man of God known by different names based on his actions, while the Talmud outlines Torah readings and haftara during Sukkot. Tanakh highlights God’s direct communication with Moses, distinguishing him as a trusted servant. Targum commentaries focus on the blessing Moses gave to the children of Israel before his death, emphasizing his role as a prophet of God.

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| וַיֹּאמַ֗ר יְהֹוָ֞ה מִסִּינַ֥י בָּא֙ וְזָרַ֤ח מִשֵּׂעִיר֙ לָ֔מוֹ הוֹפִ֙יעַ֙ מֵהַ֣ר פָּארָ֔ן וְאָתָ֖ה מֵרִבְבֹ֣ת קֹ֑דֶשׁ מִימִינ֕וֹ לָֽמוֹ׃ | 2 | He said: יהוה came from Sinai, And shone upon them from Seir; [God] appeared from Mount Paran, And approached from Ribeboth-kodesh, Lightning flashing at them from [God’s] right. |

The text discusses the concealment of God’s essence to allow His creations to withstand His radiance, the offering of the Torah to all nations before being given to the Israelites, the significance of the right hand in Torah observance, the special status of the Jewish people, and the importance of humility in connecting with the Creator. It also explores the interaction of God with various nations, the balance of mercy and judgment in the Torah, the criteria for recognizing a true prophet, and the handling of the Torah scroll with respect. Divine punishment is discussed as being meted out measure-for-measure, while Divine beneficence is emphasized as being five hundred times greater, with the protection of God’s descendants mirroring Abraham’s actions towards his visitors.

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| אַ֚ף חֹבֵ֣ב עַמִּ֔ים כׇּל־קְדֹשָׁ֖יו בְּיָדֶ֑ךָ וְהֵם֙ תֻּכּ֣וּ לְרַגְלֶ֔ךָ יִשָּׂ֖א מִדַּבְּרֹתֶֽיךָ׃ | 3 | Lover, indeed, of the people, Their hallowed are all in Your hand. They followed in Your steps, Accepting Your pronouncements, |

The text discusses the concept of love and debt in relation to studying Torah, the unity in receiving Torah, the role of Torah scholars in embodying faith for the generation, and the ability of tzaddikim to share Torah’s light; Ramban, Ibn Ezra, Rashi, Sforno, Kitzur Ba’al HaTurim, Or HaChaim, Rashbam, Tze’enah Ure’enah, Chizkuni, Shemot Rabbah, Resh Lakish, Midrash Tanchuma, Musar, Tur HaArokh, Rabbeinu Bahya, Covenant and Conversation, Second Temple, Talmud, Targum.

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| תּוֹרָ֥ה צִוָּה־לָ֖נוּ מֹשֶׁ֑ה מוֹרָשָׁ֖ה קְהִלַּ֥ת יַעֲקֹֽב׃ | 4 | When Moses charged us with the Teaching As the heritage of the congregation of Jacob. |

Chasidut emphasizes Avram’s faith in God and Baal Shem Tov’s role in sharing Torah knowledge, while Halakhah discusses the crowns of Israel and the obligation to teach Torah. Jewish Thought highlights the deep connection between the Jewish people and Torah, while Kabbalah delves into the commandments and fear of the Lord. Liturgy praises the Torah as a tree of life, and Midrash symbolizes the acceptance of Torah by Israelites. Musar warns against seeking personal gratification from Torah study, and Quoting Commentary emphasizes the democratization of Torah knowledge. Talmud warns against causing embarrassment to those who cannot study Torah and states that Torah is an inheritance for the Jewish people, while Targum highlights the Torah as the heritage of the congregation of Yaakov.

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| וַיְהִ֥י בִישֻׁר֖וּן מֶ֑לֶךְ בְּהִתְאַסֵּף֙ רָ֣אשֵׁי עָ֔ם יַ֖חַד שִׁבְטֵ֥י יִשְׂרָאֵֽל׃ | 5 | Then [God] became King in Jeshurun, When the heads of the people assembled, The tribes of Israel together. |

The text emphasizes the importance of unity among the tribes of Israel, stating that Hashem was only considered King when they were united, with the unity and acceptance of God’s kingship being essential for the enduring blessing and success of the Jewish people. The Mishneh Torah states that the city of Jerusalem and the Temple Courtyard cannot be expanded without the consent of the king, a prophet, the Urim V’Tumim, and the Sanhedrin of 71 judges, emphasizing the need to correct sins like lashon hara for redemption to take place. Rabbi Yitzchak explains that the People of Israel have merited the kingdom by guarding the covenant, and the Liturgy highlights the significance of fulfilling God’s will and proclaiming His sovereignty throughout history for enhancing the kingdom of Hashem among the Jewish people.

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| יְחִ֥י רְאוּבֵ֖ן וְאַל־יָמֹ֑ת וִיהִ֥י מְתָ֖יו מִסְפָּֽר׃ | 6 | May Reuben live and not die, Though few be his numbers. |

In Mei HaShiloach, Moshe Rabeynu blessed Reuven with vivacity and joy in his heart, corresponding to Yaakov’s blessings of excess strength and dignity. Reciting Torah sections can mitigate harsh judgments. Moses prayed for Reuben to live and not die, referencing the sin of Baal-peor. Rava proves resurrection by referencing Moshe’s blessing to Reuben. Reuben’s sin with Bilha led to him losing the birthright, priesthood, and kingship, but through repentance, he was granted life. Jacob’s prayer for Reuben to “live and not die” is a plea for the continuation of goodness in his descendants. Rabbi Shmuel bar Naḥmani connects Reuben’s and Judah’s blessings to life in this world and the World-to-Come, and resurrection of the dead. In Genesis 49:3, Jacob acknowledges Reuben’s status as the first-born. Reuvein is wished a long life and to avoid a second death in the Targum.

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| וְזֹ֣את לִיהוּדָה֮ וַיֹּאמַר֒ שְׁמַ֤ע יְהֹוָה֙ ק֣וֹל יְהוּדָ֔ה וְאֶל־עַמּ֖וֹ תְּבִיאֶ֑נּוּ יָדָיו֙ רָ֣ב ל֔וֹ וְעֵ֥זֶר מִצָּרָ֖יו תִּהְיֶֽה׃ | 7 | And this he said of Judah: Hear, יהוה, the voice of Judah And restore him to his people. Though his own hands strive for him, Help him against his foes. |

Chasidut: Moses blesses Shimon under Yehudah due to Shimon’s role in selling Joseph, while Levi is blessed for loyalty during the golden calf incident. Yehuda represents the heart of the Shechina, while Yosef spreads holiness. Commentary: Moses prays for Judah’s success in battle, alluding to Simeon’s blessing within Judah’s and highlighting the importance of acknowledging divine assistance in victories. Jewish Thought: David’s obedience and eagerness to build God’s temple are contrasted with Saul’s failure to follow divine guidance. Kabbalah: Yehuda embodies the Divine quality of Kingship, emphasizing purity and connection to the Above. Midrash: References to Judah’s confession, David’s learning, and Zevulun’s support of Torah scholars are discussed. Musar: Judah’s bones rolled due to lack of progress in studies, while David’s learning matched halachic decisions. Quoting Commentary: Various commentators provide insights on Judah’s confession, Reuben’s repentance, and God shining forth from Seir. Talmud: Judah’s confession and ability to study Torah are linked to Reuben’s confession, with Moses resolving Judah’s ostracism through prayers. Tanakh: Judah’s acknowledgment of Tamar’s righteousness, praise as a lion’s whelp, and challenges in battle are highlighted. Targum: The tribe of Judah is blessed for success in battle and protection against enemies.

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| וּלְלֵוִ֣י אָמַ֔ר תֻּמֶּ֥יךָ וְאוּרֶ֖יךָ לְאִ֣ישׁ חֲסִידֶ֑ךָ אֲשֶׁ֤ר נִסִּיתוֹ֙ בְּמַסָּ֔ה תְּרִיבֵ֖הוּ עַל־מֵ֥י מְרִיבָֽה׃ | 8 | And of Levi he said: Let Your Thummim and Urim Be with Your faithful one, Whom You tested at Massah, Challenged at the waters of Meribah; |

Chasidut explains that the oil of the Chanukah lights symbolizes kindness and halakhot revealing the light of truth, with Levi signifying attachment to God. Commentary highlights the loyalty and dedication of the Levites, especially Aaron, in upholding Torah and executing God’s justice. Kabbalah emphasizes Aaron’s fitness for Temple service through his loyalty and commitment, leading to blessings. Liturgy describes the historical events and rituals in Jewish tradition. Midrash references Moses striking the rock for water. Musar connects the Tabernacle and Aaron to rehabilitation and loving-kindness. Quoting Commentary discusses the virtues of Yaakov, Moses, and Aaron, as well as the tribe of Levi’s commitment to Torah study. Second Temple commentary addresses the unity of Simeon and Levi. Tanakh stresses the importance of proper rulings and loyalty to God. Targum recounts Moses blessing the tribe of Levi for their devotion and faithfulness.

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| הָאֹמֵ֞ר לְאָבִ֤יו וּלְאִמּוֹ֙ לֹ֣א רְאִיתִ֔יו וְאֶת־אֶחָיו֙ לֹ֣א הִכִּ֔יר וְאֶת־בָּנָ֖ו לֹ֣א יָדָ֑ע כִּ֤י שָֽׁמְרוּ֙ אִמְרָתֶ֔ךָ וּבְרִיתְךָ֖ יִנְצֹֽרוּ׃ | 9 | Who said of his father and mother, “I consider them not.” His brothers he disregarded, Ignored his own children. Your precepts alone they observed, And kept Your covenant. |

The tribe of Levi was blessed for their loyalty to God, demonstrated by their rejection of the golden calf and commitment to upholding the covenant and commandments, including circumcision. They were consecrated to serve as priests and were seen as qualitatively superior due to their ability to transcend human limitations and achieve a superior spiritual status. The Levites did not have inheritance of fields and vineyards like other tribes, but were given cities to dwell in and served as a royal guard for God, upholding sanctity and hereditary priesthood. Aaron merited the Urim and Thummim and the ability to perform Temple service by passing a test of disregarding his own family for the service of God, leading to blessings and enrichment in all worlds. The Levites were praised for their faithfulness to the covenant and circumcision, continuing to circumcise their children during the forty years in the desert, which saved the Israelites at crucial moments. The tribe of Levi was consecrated to serve in place of the first-born who failed to rally to Moses, demonstrating complete loyalty to God by rejecting the golden calf.

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| יוֹר֤וּ מִשְׁפָּטֶ֙יךָ֙ לְיַֽעֲקֹ֔ב וְתוֹרָתְךָ֖ לְיִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל יָשִׂ֤ימוּ קְטוֹרָה֙ בְּאַפֶּ֔ךָ וְכָלִ֖יל עַֽל־מִזְבְּחֶֽךָ׃ | 10 | They shall teach Your laws to Jacob And Your instructions to Israel. They shall offer You incense to savor And whole-offerings on Your altar. |

Chasidut explains how incense brings joy to the heart and nullifies the curse of having to work for sustenance. Halakhah details the Levites’ role in serving God and teaching Torah, while Jewish Thought emphasizes the importance of helping the poor and connecting leadership with Torah study. Kabbalah highlights the blessings and enrichment that come from proper service, and the Midrash stresses the significance of the tribe of Levi in upholding religious practices. The Talmud discusses the wealth of those who burn incense and the selection of priests through lotteries, and the Targum emphasizes the priests’ role in teaching the law and offering sacrifices.

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| בָּרֵ֤ךְ יְהֹוָה֙ חֵיל֔וֹ וּפֹ֥עַל יָדָ֖יו תִּרְצֶ֑ה מְחַ֨ץ מׇתְנַ֧יִם קָמָ֛יו וּמְשַׂנְאָ֖יו מִן־יְקוּמֽוּן׃ | 11 | Bless, יהוה, his substance, And favor his undertakings. Smite the loins of his foes; Let his enemies rise no more. |

Various commentators interpret the blessing on the tribe of Levi differently, focusing on aspects such as increase in possessions, protection from enemies, and acceptance of their work. The Levites did not receive a portion in the inheritance of Eretz Yisrael because they were set aside to serve God. In Kabbalah, reaching proper levels allows individuals to ascend to the service in the Temple and bring blessings and enrichment. The Mishnah discusses offering incense in the Temple as a desirable task bringing blessings, while emphasizing compassion towards the vulnerable. Rabbi Yehoshua validates offerings made by disqualified priests, and the Targums speak of blessing the wealth and offerings of Levi.

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| לְבִנְיָמִ֣ן אָמַ֔ר יְדִ֣יד יְהֹוָ֔ה יִשְׁכֹּ֥ן לָבֶ֖טַח עָלָ֑יו חֹפֵ֤ף עָלָיו֙ כׇּל־הַיּ֔וֹם וּבֵ֥ין כְּתֵפָ֖יו שָׁכֵֽן׃ | 12 | Of Benjamin he said: Beloved of יהוה, He rests securely beside [God], Who protects him always, As he rests between God’s shoulders. |

Chasidut highlights the special qualities of Rachel’s sons, Yosef and Binyamin, linked to Leah and the concept of luz. Commentary emphasizes Benjamin’s unique blessings, purity, and special relationship with God, with the future Temple in his land during the Messiah’s time. Halakhah discusses the interpretation of “ḥupah” for marriage, while Jewish Thought focuses on Benjamin’s significance in hosting the Temple. Midrash emphasizes Benjamin’s role in sanctifying the Holy Name and hosting the Shechina. Talmud discusses Benjamin’s desire to absorb a strip of land with the altar, hosting the Divine Presence in his territory. Targum mentions Mosheh blessing Benjamin for living securely with the Lord and having the Shekinah dwell among them.

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| וּלְיוֹסֵ֣ף אָמַ֔ר מְבֹרֶ֥כֶת יְהֹוָ֖ה אַרְצ֑וֹ מִמֶּ֤גֶד שָׁמַ֙יִם֙ מִטָּ֔ל וּמִתְּה֖וֹם רֹבֶ֥צֶת תָּֽחַת׃ | 13 | And of Joseph he said: Blessed of יהוה be his land With the bounty of dew from heaven, And of the deep that couches below; |

Moses blessed Joseph’s land with sweetness from heaven, dew, and groundwater, ensuring fertility and abundance due to Joseph’s righteousness and role as a provider, echoing Jacob’s blessing. The blessing represented balanced measures and was the most blessed land, ensuring crops even in drought. The blessings from heaven, the deep, and the earth were emphasized, with the Torah avoiding associating God with initiating disaster. Moses blessed the tribe of Joseph with abundant fruit from heaven, dew, rain, and deep waters.

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| וּמִמֶּ֖גֶד תְּבוּאֹ֣ת שָׁ֑מֶשׁ וּמִמֶּ֖גֶד גֶּ֥רֶשׁ יְרָחִֽים׃ | 14 | With the bounteous yield of the sun, And the bounteous crop of the moons; |

Chasidut emphasizes the influence of the stars and Mazal on individuals and objects, with the ability to direct inclinations towards holiness. Commentary discusses the sun’s influence on fruit ripening and the moon’s impact on moisture, highlighting the benefits for agriculture. Halakhah connects the commandment of offering sacrifices on Rosh Chodesh to the significant effects of the sun and moon on the world. Quoting commentary delves into the creation of vegetation on the third day and the symbolism of the garden in Eden. In Talmud, remedies for bulmos involve feeding sheep’s tail with honey and consuming fruits ripened by the sun. The Targums on Deuteronomy 33:14 emphasize the role of the sun and moon in producing bounteous harvests month after month.

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| וּמֵרֹ֖אשׁ הַרְרֵי־קֶ֑דֶם וּמִמֶּ֖גֶד גִּבְע֥וֹת עוֹלָֽם׃ | 15 | With the best from the ancient mountains, And the bounty of hills immemorial; |

Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Rabbeinu Bahya, Siftei Chakhamim, Steinsaltz, and Chizkuni discuss the blessings of early ripening fruits on the hills of Joseph in Deuteronomy 33:15. Radak, Rashbam, and Rabbeinu Bahya interpret the blessings of grapes and abundance in the land of Yehudah and Joseph in Genesis 49:11 and 49:26. The Talmud describes the locations of the Tabernacle and Temple in Benjamin’s territory, the pleasure of the Dweller in Joseph’s territory, and the altar on the border between Joseph and Benjamin. The Targums on Deuteronomy 33:15 attribute the abundance of the land to the blessings and merit of the patriarchs and matriarchs.

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| וּמִמֶּ֗גֶד אֶ֚רֶץ וּמְלֹאָ֔הּ וּרְצ֥וֹן שֹׁכְנִ֖י סְנֶ֑ה תָּב֙וֹאתָה֙ לְרֹ֣אשׁ יוֹסֵ֔ף וּלְקׇדְקֹ֖ד נְזִ֥יר אֶחָֽיו׃ | 16 | With the bounty of earth and its fullness, And the favor of the Presence in the Bush. May these rest on the head of Joseph, On the crown of the elect of his brothers. |

The text discusses the meeting of Hesed and Truth in the characters of Aaron and Moses, with Moses learning patience through the burning bush and blessing Joseph with the attribute of patience. Blessings upon the land of Joseph emphasize God’s goodwill and bounty, with insights into specific words and phrases provided by various commentators. The term “Shechinah” signifies God’s Divine Presence in a specific place or object. Benjamin’s sons were named based on the experience of his missing brother, Joseph’s bow symbolizes his passion, and Joseph reassures his brothers with gentle words. Joseph was blessed with good land for his righteousness, and the Divine Presence dwelt in the greatness of Joseph. Moses encounters a messenger of God at Mount Horeb in a burning bush, while Jacob blesses Joseph with surpassing blessings. The blessings and favor bestowed upon Joseph are emphasized in all three commentaries on Deuteronomy 33:16.

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| בְּכ֨וֹר שׁוֹר֜וֹ הָדָ֣ר ל֗וֹ וְקַרְנֵ֤י רְאֵם֙ קַרְנָ֔יו בָּהֶ֗ם עַמִּ֛ים יְנַגַּ֥ח יַחְדָּ֖ו אַפְסֵי־אָ֑רֶץ וְהֵם֙ רִבְב֣וֹת אֶפְרַ֔יִם וְהֵ֖ם אַלְפֵ֥י מְנַשֶּֽׁה׃ | 17 | Like a firstling bull in his majesty, He has horns like the horns of the wild-ox; With them he gores the peoples, The ends of the earth one and all. These are the myriads of Ephraim, Those are the thousands of Manasseh. |

Chasidut emphasizes Yosef’s connection to inner intelligence and charity, while Moses blesses Joseph’s descendants for their military prowess. Halakhah details the requirements for a shofar on Rosh Hashanah, excluding cow horns. Jewish Thought discusses the role of Mashiach ben Yosef in Gog and Magog, and Kabbalah symbolizes the victory over Amalek with cow horns. Liturgy references Joseph as B’chor Shor in prayers for self-improvement, while Midrash discusses the division between light and darkness. Mishnah and Talmud address the suitability of shofarot and blessings of Joseph. Musar highlights the spiritual significance of Amaleik and the concept of “horns.” Ramban refutes theories about Simeon’s involvement in the sin of Baal-peor, and Tanakh mentions Moses transferring authority to Joshua. Targum speaks of the dominance and victory of Joseph’s descendants in battle.

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| וְלִזְבוּלֻ֣ן אָמַ֔ר שְׂמַ֥ח זְבוּלֻ֖ן בְּצֵאתֶ֑ךָ וְיִשָּׂשכָ֖ר בְּאֹהָלֶֽיךָ׃ | 18 | And of Zebulun he said: Rejoice, O Zebulun, on your journeys, And Issachar, in your tents. |

Zebulun is associated with business activity to support Issachar in Torah study, with both considered important. Torah study is prioritized in Halakhah, with support for scholars crucial. The partnership between Zebulun and Issachar in providing for Torah study is emphasized in Midrash and Musar, with blessings highlighting their collaboration. Commentary explains the blessings of Zebulun and Issachar, while Tanakh mentions Joseph presenting his brothers to Pharaoh. Targum emphasizes rejoicing in commerce and Torah study for Zebulun and Issachar.

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| עַמִּים֙ הַר־יִקְרָ֔אוּ שָׁ֖ם יִזְבְּח֣וּ זִבְחֵי־צֶ֑דֶק כִּ֣י שֶׁ֤פַע יַמִּים֙ יִינָ֔קוּ וּשְׂפֻנֵ֖י טְמ֥וּנֵי חֽוֹל׃ | 19 | They invite their kin to the mountain, Where they offer sacrifices of success. For they draw from the riches of the sea And the hidden hoards of the sand. |

The tribes of Israel, particularly Zebulun and Issachar, will gather at Mount Moriah for festivals, with Zebulun drawing wealth from the seas for Torah study and having hidden treasures in the sand, potentially leading to conversions. The Hillazon and Amidah prayer are discussed in Halakhah, while Guide for the Perplexed explains the actions of incorporeal beings. Rabbi El’azar mentions seven seas in Kabbalah, the psalm of the sons of Korach emphasizes God’s sovereignty in Liturgy, and Midrash discusses Moses blessing Israel and Zebulun and Issachar’s partnership in Torah. Musar touches on the repair of the world and the consequences of separating from the community. Zebulun’s connection to the sea and hidden treasures is highlighted in a quote from Commentary, and in Talmud, God reassures Zebulun of the value of his territory. The Issacharites were skilled in interpreting signs in Tanakh, and Targum discusses the tribes gathering at the mountain of the sanctuary for offerings and utilizing resources from the sea and sands.

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| וּלְגָ֣ד אָמַ֔ר בָּר֖וּךְ מַרְחִ֣יב גָּ֑ד כְּלָבִ֣יא שָׁכֵ֔ן וְטָרַ֥ף זְר֖וֹעַ אַף־קׇדְקֹֽד׃ | 20 | And of Gad he said: Blessed be the One who enlarges Gad! Poised is he like a lion To tear off arm and scalp. |

Moses blessed Gad for their enlarged territory towards the east, praising their strength and prowess in battle. The Midrash discusses Miriam’s sequestering, Moses’s burial, and Joseph’s selection of five men. The commentary on Genesis 49:19 and Deuteronomy 33:20 highlights Gad’s courage and military prowess, with the tribe known for their strength and bravery in defending their territory. The Reubenites and Gadites will lead Israel into battle, while Targum emphasizes Gad’s strength in defeating rulers and kings.

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| וַיַּ֤רְא רֵאשִׁית֙ ל֔וֹ כִּי־שָׁ֛ם חֶלְקַ֥ת מְחֹקֵ֖ק סָפ֑וּן וַיֵּתֵא֙ רָ֣אשֵׁי עָ֔ם צִדְקַ֤ת יְהֹוָה֙ עָשָׂ֔ה וּמִשְׁפָּטָ֖יו עִם־יִשְׂרָאֵֽל׃ | 21 | He chose for himself the best, For there is the portion of the revered chieftain, Where the heads of the people come. He executed יהוה’s judgments And God’s decisions for Israel. |

Chasidut emphasizes the connection between charity and embracing mishpat, with references to Deuteronomy and Psalms. Commentary highlights the role of Moses and the tribe of Gad in fulfilling the righteousness of the Lord during the conquest of the land. Jewish Thought stresses the importance of keeping the Torah’s chukim for future generations and the merit of rectifying oneself and others. Kabbalah discusses the connection between the Father and the Righteous-One, ensuring the lowly do not return ashamed. Midrash recounts the story of Jonah being thrown into the sea and swallowed by a great fish. Mishnah contrasts the accountability of leading others to righteousness versus sin. Musar discusses Moses’ role in defeating adversaries of the Jewish people and the negative traits that led to the downfall of Korach and others. Quoting Commentary attributes righteousness to Moses and sin to Jeroboam. Talmud describes Moses’ burial place in the portion of Gad and his role as an inscriber of righteousness. Tanakh mentions the instructions for the fighting men to cross the Jordan armed. Targum discusses the burial plot of Moses and his righteous actions. Tosefta recounts Serakh informing Moses of Joseph’s burial and the thigh as the starting point of transgression.

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| וּלְדָ֣ן אָמַ֔ר דָּ֖ן גּ֣וּר אַרְיֵ֑ה יְזַנֵּ֖ק מִן־הַבָּשָֽׁן׃ | 22 | And of Dan he said: Dan is a lion’s whelp That leaps forth from Bashan. |

Dan is likened to a lion’s cub due to living near the border and exhibiting bravery and strength, with their tactics compared to those of lions attacking enemies. The tribe of Dan took portions in both the northwest and northeast regions, guarding the borders to prevent enemy forces from entering Israelite territory. In Midrash, Jacob’s sons are compared to wild beasts, emphasizing their strength and fierceness. Moses appointed judges to execute sinners, with Phineas taking action against those who worshipped Baal Peor. Moses blesses the tribe of Dan, describing their land as watered by streams from various locations.

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| וּלְנַפְתָּלִ֣י אָמַ֔ר נַפְתָּלִי֙ שְׂבַ֣ע רָצ֔וֹן וּמָלֵ֖א בִּרְכַּ֣ת יְהֹוָ֑ה יָ֥ם וְדָר֖וֹם יְרָֽשָׁה׃ | 23 | And of Naphtali he said: O Naphtali, sated with favor And full of יהוה’s blessing, Take possession on the west and south. |

The tribe of Naphtali was blessed with abundant land and early ripening fruit, symbolizing possession of treasures in both present and future worlds. The cup of blessing must be full, undiluted, and washed before being blessed, with water added at the blessing “ha-aretz.” The term “male” in Hebrew signifies completion and attainment of excellence, illustrated through biblical examples. The Torah is considered a blessing, symbolized by the letter ב, providing nourishment and guidance for inheriting both this world and the next. Rabbi Yochanan and R. Jose, son of R. Chanina, state that reciting a blessing over a full cup of wine results in a boundless inheritance in both worlds. Moses blessed the tribe of Naphtali with favor and blessings from the Lord, inheriting land near the Sea of Galilee and to the south.

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| וּלְאָשֵׁ֣ר אָמַ֔ר בָּר֥וּךְ מִבָּנִ֖ים אָשֵׁ֑ר יְהִ֤י רְצוּי֙ אֶחָ֔יו וְטֹבֵ֥ל בַּשֶּׁ֖מֶן רַגְלֽוֹ׃ | 24 | And of Asher he said: Most blessed of sons be Asher; May he be the favorite of his brothers, May he dip his foot in oil. |

The month of Shevat is associated with the Tribe of Asher, known for their abundance of olive oil symbolizing wisdom, with blessings from Moses in Genesis and Deuteronomy. Asher’s prosperity through olive oil made him well-liked by his brothers, reflected in the beauty and marriages of his daughters. The Midrash discusses various aspects of the tribes, highlighting Asher’s association with illumination and Dan with darkness. The tribe of Asher in the camp of Dan was blessed with many sons, possibly due to generosity in charity, with tithing related to unlimited blessings. Ramban, Kli Yakar, Rashbam, Radak, Rashi, and others elaborate on Asher’s blessings, emphasizing the abundance of olive trees and oil. The Talmud discusses Asher’s tribal portion and abundance of oil, as well as the number of nails permissible on shoes for decoration on the Sabbath. Mosheh blesses Asher’s tribe with many sons and favor from their brothers, with an abundance of olives and oil for bathing and nourishment.

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| בַּרְזֶ֥ל וּנְחֹ֖שֶׁת מִנְעָלֶ֑ךָ וּכְיָמֶ֖יךָ דׇּבְאֶֽךָ׃ | 25 | May your doorbolts be iron and copper, And your security last all your days. |

Chasidut emphasizes the connection between strength in youth and blessings in old age, as exemplified by Moshe Rabbeinu passing down wisdom to future generations. The blessing to the tribe of Asher promises security, prosperity, and strength, symbolized by protection from invaders and the flow of abundance even in old age. The Midrashic texts highlight the prosperity of Eretz Yisrael and the importance of Torah scholars in guiding others towards wisdom and life. In Talmud, the rules regarding wearing nail-studded work-boots on the Sabbath are discussed, with differing opinions on the number of nails considered a decoration. Targum texts emphasize the enduring strength and vitality of the tribe of Asher in old age compared to their youth.

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| אֵ֥ין כָּאֵ֖ל יְשֻׁר֑וּן רֹכֵ֤ב שָׁמַ֙יִם֙ בְּעֶזְרֶ֔ךָ וּבְגַאֲוָת֖וֹ שְׁחָקִֽים׃ | 26 | O Jeshurun, there is none like God, Riding through the heavens to help you, Through the skies in His majesty. |

Chasidut connects G’d’s attributes to the behavior of the Jewish people, emphasizing divine assistance and uniqueness. Jewish Thought discusses God’s dominion over celestial bodies and the significance of the number ten in creation. Kabbalah explores the importance of righteous actions and the relationship between divine names. Midrash delves into the structure of the Earth, firmaments, and the significance of Torah study. Musar highlights the kindness of studying Torah לשמה. Quoting Commentary references interpretations of the firmament, celestial camp, and God’s powers. Talmud mentions discrepancies in scrolls found in the Temple courtyard and discusses God dwelling above celestial beings in Aravot. Targum emphasizes the incomparable nature of the God of Israel residing in the heavens.

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| מְעֹנָהֿ֙ אֱלֹ֣הֵי קֶ֔דֶם וּמִתַּ֖חַת זְרֹעֹ֣ת עוֹלָ֑ם וַיְגָ֧רֶשׁ מִפָּנֶ֛יךָ אוֹיֵ֖ב וַיֹּ֥אמֶר הַשְׁמֵֽד׃ | 27 | The ancient God is a refuge, A support are the arms everlasting. He drove out the enemy before you By His command: Destroy! |

Chasidut emphasizes removing desires for money and idolatry, ascending with lights to enjoy the inheritance of the patriarchs, and following counsel and the merit of the Patriarchs for healing and understanding. Halakhah details the procedures after Hakafos with three Sifrei Torah, while Jewish Thought explores the concept of dominion over things and the importance of belief in God. Kabbalah delves into God’s role as creator and sustainer, the mysteries of the Torah, and the dependence of all existence on God. Midrash discusses the support of the world by various elements, the importance of studying Torah and prayer, and the relationship between God and the world. Musar highlights G-d as the “place” of the world, favoring the Jewish people for their humility, and adding stature to G-d through good deeds. Quoting Commentary includes explanations from various commentators on topics such as marriage restrictions for a priest’s daughter, the modesty of the righteous, and the inability of the world to contain God. Talmud recounts instances of discrepancies in Torah scrolls found in the Temple court, the creation of the world, and discussions on God as the “Place” of the world. Targum emphasizes the eternal God’s power, protection of His people, and scattering of enemies through His Word.

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| וַיִּשְׁכֹּן֩ יִשְׂרָאֵ֨ל בֶּ֤טַח בָּדָד֙ עֵ֣ין יַֽעֲקֹ֔ב אֶל־אֶ֖רֶץ דָּגָ֣ן וְתִיר֑וֹשׁ אַף־שָׁמָ֖יו יַ֥עַרְפוּ טָֽל׃ | 28 | Thus Israel dwells in safety, Untroubled is Jacob’s abode, In a land of grain and wine, Under heavens dripping dew. |

Chasidut explains that foreign thoughts stem from the corruption of mishpat related to the eyes, illustrated by the verse “They came to AYN Mishpat.” Jewish Thought discusses the positive aspects of loneliness for spiritual growth, while Kabbalah emphasizes Jacob’s descendants dwelling securely alone in exile. Liturgy praises God for His path through the Reed Sea and the dew in the skies. Midrash highlights Israel’s connection to dew and God’s peace, and Mishnah details the roasting of the Paschal lamb. Quoting Commentary offers interpretations of various biblical verses, and Talmud discusses Israel’s solitude in terms of wealth and sorrow. Tanakh includes blessings for abundance and security, and Targum describes Israel living securely in a land of blessing.

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| אַשְׁרֶ֨יךָ יִשְׂרָאֵ֜ל מִ֣י כָמ֗וֹךָ עַ֚ם נוֹשַׁ֣ע בַּֽיהֹוָ֔ה מָגֵ֣ן עֶזְרֶ֔ךָ וַאֲשֶׁר־חֶ֖רֶב גַּאֲוָתֶ֑ךָ וְיִכָּחֲשׁ֤וּ אֹיְבֶ֙יךָ֙ לָ֔ךְ וְאַתָּ֖ה עַל־בָּמוֹתֵ֥ימוֹ תִדְרֹֽךְ׃ | 29 | O happy Israel! Who is like you, A people delivered by יהוה, Your protecting Shield, your Sword triumphant! Your enemies shall come cringing before you, And you shall tread on their backs. |

Chasidut warns against leaders wielding the sword of pride, obtained through converts, to rule over the people arrogantly (Likutei Moharan). In Jewish Thought, prosperity and ruin are tied to God’s pleasure and anger, respectively, with Gersonides explaining God’s foreknowledge. Kabbalah discusses Israel’s ascent to the Unlimited One-Ein Sof through the middle line, while Liturgy and Midrash emphasize God’s role in Israel’s victories. Musar discusses how blessings were used differently by Samael and Rahav, leading to the Torah being bestowed upon Israel. Talmud highlights the importance of delighting in Shabbat, and Tanakh recounts the deception of the Gibeonites by Joshua. Targum emphasizes Israel’s unique blessings and protection from God.

## Deuteronomy 34

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| וַיַּ֨עַל מֹשֶׁ֜ה מֵעַרְבֹ֤ת מוֹאָב֙ אֶל־הַ֣ר נְב֔וֹ רֹ֚אשׁ הַפִּסְגָּ֔ה אֲשֶׁ֖ר עַל־פְּנֵ֣י יְרֵח֑וֹ וַיַּרְאֵ֨הוּ יְהֹוָ֧ה אֶת־כׇּל־הָאָ֛רֶץ אֶת־הַגִּלְעָ֖ד עַד־דָּֽן׃ | 1 | Moses went up from the steppes of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the summit of Pisgah, opposite Jericho, and יהוה showed him the whole land: Gilead as far as Dan; |

Moses was granted supernatural eyesight on Mount Nebo to see the entire land of Israel prophetically, including future events in different regions. On Simchat Torah, a custom involves everyone in the congregation reading the Torah to increase joy. Moses’ death and burial are described in the Midrash, emphasizing the power of prayer and the significance of his requests being granted by God. In Musar, Moses asks for a successor to unite the Jewish people, reaching the fiftieth level of understanding before his death, symbolized by his ascent to Mount Nebo. The Talmud notes Moses’ physical strength until his death and the boundaries of Eretz Yisrael. In Tanakh, the Danites set up a sculptured image and Jonathan serves as a priest for them. The Targum emphasizes the land shown to Moses and the mighty acts of future leaders, while the Tosefta describes Moses’ burial by the Shekhinah and the significance of divine retribution.

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| וְאֵת֙ כׇּל־נַפְתָּלִ֔י וְאֶת־אֶ֥רֶץ אֶפְרַ֖יִם וּמְנַשֶּׁ֑ה וְאֵת֙ כׇּל־אֶ֣רֶץ יְהוּדָ֔ה עַ֖ד הַיָּ֥ם הָאַחֲרֽוֹן׃ | 2 | all Naphtali; the land of Ephraim and Manasseh; the whole land of Judah as far as the Western Sea; |

God showed Moses the land of Naphtali, Ephraim, Manasseh, Judah, and the western sea, revealing their prosperity, ruin, and future events, including wars and victories of various tribes and kings, as well as the resurrection of the dead. The regions mentioned in the verse are identified according to the tribes that settled there, with the “last sea” referring to the Mediterranean Sea. The Targum commentary on Deuteronomy 34:2 mentions the territories of Naphtali, Ephraim, Manasseh, and Judah, as well as the leaders and kings associated with these regions until the destruction of the sanctuary. Rabbeinu Bahya, Ramban, and Rashi provide insights into the significance of Hebrew terms for directions and emphasize the exclusivity of certain gifts to the Jewish people, such as prophecy, Torah, the land of Israel, and resurrection of the bodies.

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| וְאֶת־הַנֶּ֗גֶב וְֽאֶת־הַכִּכָּ֞ר בִּקְעַ֧ת יְרֵח֛וֹ עִ֥יר הַתְּמָרִ֖ים עַד־צֹֽעַר׃ | 3 | the Negeb; and the Plain—the Valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees—as far as Zoar. |

Chasidut explains the significance of Jericho in symbolizing the connection to ethereal levels and the idea that the end is embedded in the beginning, while the sages disagreed with the practice of reciting the Shema without pausing after “today.” Rashi, Steinsaltz, Chizkuni, and Midrash provide interpretations of various terms and concepts related to the land and God’s revelations. Mishnah discusses the protocol for allowing remarriage based on hearsay testimony, with Rabbi Akiva arguing against relying on women’s testimony. The Talmud mentions Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi’s beliefs about the Temple’s location and the descendants of Jethro, while Tanakh and Targum provide further insights and interpretations related to Jericho and surrounding areas.

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| וַיֹּ֨אמֶר יְהֹוָ֜ה אֵלָ֗יו זֹ֤את הָאָ֙רֶץ֙ אֲשֶׁ֣ר נִ֠שְׁבַּ֠עְתִּי לְאַבְרָהָ֨ם לְיִצְחָ֤ק וּֽלְיַעֲקֹב֙ לֵאמֹ֔ר לְזַרְעֲךָ֖ אֶתְּנֶ֑נָּה הֶרְאִיתִ֣יךָ בְעֵינֶ֔יךָ וְשָׁ֖מָּה לֹ֥א תַעֲבֹֽר׃ | 4 | And יהוה said to him, “This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, ‘I will assign it to your offspring.’ I have let you see it with your own eyes, but you shall not cross there.” |

Moses was shown the land of Israel to fulfill the oath to the patriarchs, but forbidden to enter to prevent his blessing from invalidating future events. Communication between Moses and the patriarchs after death is debated, with the Talmud suggesting the dead can communicate. Moses’ soul ascended to heaven immediately upon death. Fathers are obligated to teach their sons Torah from a young age, aligning with the Mishnah’s instruction to start studying Scripture at five. Moses’ viewing of the land was interpreted as a vision of the future, distinct from other mortals. Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Eliezer have different interpretations of how Moses saw the land, with the Midrash discussing future generations and the number of benedictions a man should pray each day. Philo emphasizes the allegorical meaning of Abraham’s migration and the importance of faith in God’s promises. The Talmud discusses the number of mitzvot in the Torah and the disrespect of relieving oneself in a cemetery. God promised Moses that the land of Israel would be given to the descendants of the patriarchs, but Moses would only see it with his eyes.

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| וַיָּ֨מׇת שָׁ֜ם מֹשֶׁ֧ה עֶבֶד־יְהֹוָ֛ה בְּאֶ֥רֶץ מוֹאָ֖ב עַל־פִּ֥י יְהֹוָֽה׃ | 5 | So Moses the servant of יהוה died there, in the land of Moab, at the command of יהוה. |

The Talmud describes the deaths of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam as being like a divine kiss from God, symbolizing their great love and knowledge of Him. Moses’ death was marked by his soul being removed from his body by a kiss from God, leading to mourning in heaven. Moses’ ability to stand next to God at the revelation is highlighted, and his burial place remains unknown to prevent desecration. Moses’ death is discussed in various commentaries, with Ramban emphasizing his blessing being fulfilled as a man of God, and lessons in leadership highlighting his role as a servant of God.

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| וַיִּקְבֹּ֨ר אֹת֤וֹ בַגַּי֙ בְּאֶ֣רֶץ מוֹאָ֔ב מ֖וּל בֵּ֣ית פְּע֑וֹר וְלֹא־יָדַ֥ע אִישׁ֙ אֶת־קְבֻ֣רָת֔וֹ עַ֖ד הַיּ֥וֹם הַזֶּֽה׃ | 6 | [God] buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, near Beth-peor; and no one knows his burial place to this day. |

Chasidut explains that Haman symbolizes idol worship, countered by Moshe who received the Torah to eliminate idolatry and was buried opposite Beit Pe’or to signify the elimination of idolatry. Commentary from Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Sforno, Rabbeinu Bahya, Steinsaltz, Chizkuni, and others discusses the burial of Moses and the mystery surrounding its location. Jewish Thought reflects on God’s sorrow, Moses’ unfulfilled longing, and the negative experience of his death, contrasting with Elijah and Enoch’s ascension to Heaven. Kabbalah emphasizes the importance of humility in connecting with the Creator. Midrash highlights instances of steadfast love in the Torah, including God burying Moses. Mishnah states that God personally buries righteous individuals. Musar discusses the duty of burying the dead and the importance of emulating God’s ways. Quoting Commentary from various sources emphasizes the reflexive use of pronouns in the Torah and the unknown burial place of Moses to prevent it from becoming a place of worship. Second Temple texts mention the translation of virtuous individuals to another place of abode. Talmud discusses Moses’ burial by God, the unknown location of his grave, and the importance of acts of kindness. Targum and Tosefta provide additional details on Moses’ burial location and the Divine retribution on initiators of transgression.

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| וּמֹשֶׁ֗ה בֶּן־מֵאָ֧ה וְעֶשְׂרִ֛ים שָׁנָ֖ה בְּמֹת֑וֹ לֹא־כָהֲתָ֥ה עֵינ֖וֹ וְלֹא־נָ֥ס לֵחֹֽה׃ | 7 | Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died; his eyes were undimmed and his vigor unabated. |

Chasidut interprets Moshe’s burial as symbolizing his ascent into Ein Sof and Malkhut, with tefillin representing fear of God and the repair of imagination to receive light. Moses’ physical vitality and appearance remained unchanged even after his death, attributed to the divine presence with him. Jewish Thought highlights Moses’ vitality and fierce leadership, while Midrash details his significant encounters and mourns his passing. Musar emphasizes Moses’ undiminished strength and the rejection of his prayers, and quoting commentary discusses the significance of Moses’ undimmed eyes and unabated strength at 120 years old. The Second Temple commentary reflects on the differences in the years of the guilty and the sage, while the Talmud discusses Moses’ physical strength and symbolic connections. Finally, Targum notes that Moses died at 120 with no change in appearance or vitality.

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| וַיִּבְכּוּ֩ בְנֵ֨י יִשְׂרָאֵ֧ל אֶת־מֹשֶׁ֛ה בְּעַֽרְבֹ֥ת מוֹאָ֖ב שְׁלֹשִׁ֣ים י֑וֹם וַֽיִּתְּמ֔וּ יְמֵ֥י בְכִ֖י אֵ֥בֶל מֹשֶֽׁה׃ | 8 | And the Israelites bewailed Moses in the steppes of Moab for thirty days. The period of wailing and mourning for Moses came to an end. |

The children of Israel mourned Moses for thirty days in the plains of Moab, as stated in Deuteronomy 34:8. Halakhah dictates that mourning for Torah scholars should not exceed 30 days, with eulogies not surpassing twelve months. Moses’ leadership was marked by a lack of small talk, while Aaron’s focus on peace and unity led to a more profound mourning for him. Aaron’s death was foretold by God to Moses, and both Moses and Aaron were mourned for thirty days. Moses’ relationship with the oral Torah is symbolized by his title as “husband of the spiritual bride.” Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi instructed to reconvene study sessions after thirty days of mourning, following the example of the mourning for Moses. The Israelites mourned Aaron’s death for thirty days after learning of his passing.

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| וִיהוֹשֻׁ֣עַ בִּן־נ֗וּן מָלֵא֙ ר֣וּחַ חׇכְמָ֔ה כִּֽי־סָמַ֥ךְ מֹשֶׁ֛ה אֶת־יָדָ֖יו עָלָ֑יו וַיִּשְׁמְע֨וּ אֵלָ֤יו בְּנֵֽי־יִשְׂרָאֵל֙ וַֽיַּעֲשׂ֔וּ כַּאֲשֶׁ֛ר צִוָּ֥ה יְהֹוָ֖ה אֶת־מֹשֶֽׁה׃ | 9 | Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands upon him; and the Israelites heeded him, doing as יהוה had commanded Moses. |

In Chasidut, the ability to produce worthy students and instill wisdom is connected to the House of God, as seen in Moshe laying hands on Yehoshua and the spelling of Chanukah being hinted at in the verse about Yehoshua being filled with wisdom. Halakhah dictates that on Simchat Torah, the Torah is read by more than a quorum to increase joy, with everyone in the congregation reading. In Jewish Thought, the freewill offering is more pleasing to God than other offerings, symbolizing a desire for close communion with Him. The destruction of the First and Second Temples coincided with days of merit and punishment, and elders appointed by Moses were significant to God. In Talmud, Moses transferring authority to Joshua is likened to giving credit to the one who pours wine. In Targum, Yehoshua was filled with wisdom after Moshe laid his hands on him, and in Tosefta, Moses and Ezra are highlighted as ideal Torah teachers with authority to implement the script and language.

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| וְלֹא־קָ֨ם נָבִ֥יא ע֛וֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל כְּמֹשֶׁ֑ה אֲשֶׁר֙ יְדָע֣וֹ יְהֹוָ֔ה פָּנִ֖ים אֶל־פָּנִֽים׃ | 10 | Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses—whom יהוה singled out, face to face, |

The text discusses Moses’ exceptional spiritual heights and unique relationship with God, as evidenced by his prophecy and direct communication with God, setting him apart from all other prophets. Moses’ prophecy is distinguished by its superiority and miraculous nature, with the Torah emphasizing the eternal nature of his prophecy and the impossibility of another prophet like him arising. Moses’ ability to access a deeper understanding of God and communicate directly with Him is highlighted, contrasting with other prophets who required prayer and doubt before performing miracles. Moses’ prophetic insights and special relationship with God are emphasized, with his unique connection to the divine symbolized by his ability to know HaShem face to face and speak to Him mouth to mouth. The text emphasizes the transient nature of life and inevitability of death for all, despite one’s righteousness or wickedness, with Moses ultimately accepting his fate and preparing for death. Moses’ prophetic abilities and leadership qualities set him apart from all other prophets in Israel, with a level of intimacy with God that is unparalleled.

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| לְכׇל־הָ֨אֹתֹ֜ת וְהַמּוֹפְתִ֗ים אֲשֶׁ֤ר שְׁלָחוֹ֙ יְהֹוָ֔ה לַעֲשׂ֖וֹת בְּאֶ֣רֶץ מִצְרָ֑יִם לְפַרְעֹ֥ה וּלְכׇל־עֲבָדָ֖יו וּלְכׇל־אַרְצֽוֹ׃ | 11 | for the various signs and portents that יהוה sent him to display in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his courtiers and his whole country, |

Moses performed unprecedented miracles publicly with the Great Name of God, setting him apart from other prophets who needed to pray before performing miracles. His close relationship with God allowed him to perform great signs and wonders, distinguishing him as the prophet par excellence. Moses’ prophetic commission was evidenced by the miracles and deeds he performed, showcasing his authority as a leader chosen by God.

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| וּלְכֹל֙ הַיָּ֣ד הַחֲזָקָ֔ה וּלְכֹ֖ל הַמּוֹרָ֣א הַגָּד֑וֹל אֲשֶׁר֙ עָשָׂ֣ה מֹשֶׁ֔ה לְעֵינֵ֖י כׇּל־יִשְׂרָאֵֽל׃ | 12 | and for all the great might and awesome power that Moses displayed before all Israel. |

Chasidut emphasizes the existence of two Torahs, written and oral, with events written about before they occurred, illustrating free will and foreseen events in the Torah. Halakhah details rules for reading the Torah in a synagogue and writing it, including a prayer for salvation and the coming of the Redeemer. Jewish Thought raises questions and critiques about Moses’ actions and choices in the story of the burning bush. Kabbalah discusses the 42 letters at the end of the Torah and their division into three hands. Midrash describes various events in the journey of the children of Israel and Moses’ actions. Musar highlights the symbolism of the Ten Commandments and the distinction between the written and oral law. Quoting Commentary discusses the unique position of Deuteronomy in the Torah, emphasizing teaching and learning. Talmud outlines rules for finishing Torah scrolls and discusses Moses’ actions in various texts. Targum praises Moshe for his displays of strength and power.